OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

RETRO GAMER™

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | ... | SINCLAIR | NEO-GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

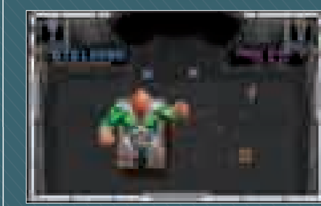
CANNON FODDER

PERFECT PROOF THAT WAR WAS ACTUALLY A LOT OF FUN

THE MAKING OF…

SMASH TV

EUGENE JARVIS TALKS BIG MONEY, BIG PRIZES AND WHY HE LOVES SMASH TV



WWW.RETROGAMER.NET

THE DEFINITIVE…

CONTRA

RETRO GAMER BLOWS KONAMI'S CLASSIC RUN-'N'-GUN FRANCHISE WIDE OPEN

THE MAKING OF...

WIPEOUT

HOW PSYGNOSIS' RACER HELPED DEFINE THE PSX

RETRO REVIVAL

SUPER TENNIS

REDISCOVERING THE CLASSIC 16-BIT HIT

COMPANY PROFILE

ZENOBI

THE BALROG ON THE RISE AND FALL OF ZENOBI SOFTWARE

FLAMING FISTS OF FURY

KING OF FIGHTERS

SNK ON BEATING CAPCOM AT ITS OWN GAME



FEATURED THIS MONTH IN RETRO

VECTREX
JAY SMITH ON WHY HIS UNIQUE CONSOLE FAILED TO CATCH THE PUBLIC EYE

MARIO BROS
THE CLASSIC PLATFORMERS THAT GOT LOST IN JAPAN

FORGOTTEN WORLDS
BURLY MEN, MASSIVE LASERS AND COOL SUNGLASSES. WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT?

CAULDRON
BEHIND THE SCENES OF PALACE'S CLASSIC 8-BIT PLATFORMERS

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE BEAT-'EM-UP



ASHLEY DAY

Streets Of Rage! Never has a game made me feel so cool while I'm beating up local thugs. But then I don't usually listen to Yuzo Koshiro while I'm roaming the streets of Bournemouth.
Expertise: The world's second best retro magazine
Currently playing:
Okami
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III



JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

The *Psychic Force* series. Crazy anime characters, Japanese theme songs, a unique 3D floating mechanic, which sets it apart from every other fighter, and also lots of projectile attacks. Nothing else like it. Awesome.
Expertise: Doujin games
Currently playing:
Musical mags
Favourite game of all time:
Trampoline Gunmen



DARRAN JONES

Street Fighter III: Third Strike beyond a shadow of a doubt. You can forget your *Tekkens*, *Soul Calibur*s and *Mortal Kombats*, nothing else can touch Capcom's super brawler. And if it could, *Third Strike* would simply parry it. Zing.
Expertise: Juggling a wife, two children and Retro Gamer
Currently playing:
Crackdown
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



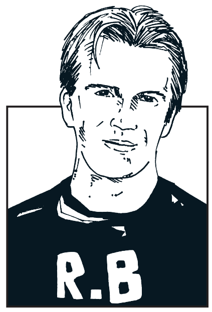
DAVID CROOKES

I love *Double Dragon*. Yep, even with the blocky graphics on the Amstrad, which was my first experience of the game.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Oddworld: Abe's Odyssey
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



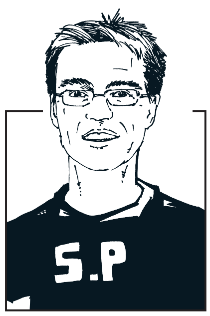
PAUL DRURY

Tekken, for sentimental reasons. Christmas 1995, crowded round the console with the Fourie family, feeling like the future had arrived and marvelling at granny's Yoshimitsu impression. I've adored the series ever since.
Expertise: Getting programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing:
Hyper Bishi Bashi
(On hard)
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



RICHARD BURTON

King Of Fighters: The annual tradition of the new *KOF* game was like waiting for Christmas. Sometimes you got something great, sometimes not. Overall, a terrific collection.
Expertise:
Spectrum and Amstrad gaming.
Currently playing:
Pacific (Amstrad)
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



SIMON PHILLIPS

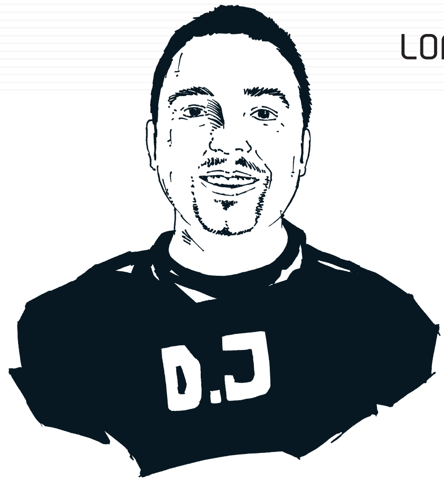
Street Fighter of course. Well, not actually the first one as that was pretty awful, but *Street Fighter II: Turbo* on the SNES received a right caning from me. Oh, and *Soul Calibur* is pretty good as well.
Expertise:
Juggling babies and work
Currently playing:
Crackdown
(not with Darran though)
Favourite game of all time:
Head Over Heels



CRAIG GRANNELL

No two games from any single beat-'em-up series have floated my boat, so I'm going to have to go for "King of Barbarian of the Exploding IK+ Calibur".
Expertise: Games whose controllers don't require you to have 37 fingers
Currently playing:
Pitfall!
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.

LOADING...



January is never a nice month. The mornings are always bleak and miserable, bills start appearing seemingly out of thin air and payday seems an age away. And then, to top it all, your treasured staff writer says that he's off to pastures new. Yup, it's been quite a stressful month here at Retro Gamer towers, but don't worry, as it's the start of a New Year and despite the loss of John and his love for everything weird and wonderful, the show will, most definitely, go on.

So, as we approach the month of March (yes, I know we've missed out February, but that's deadlines for you) allow us to warm your cockles with a delightful array of sizzling articles that should make your tootsies curl with delight.

We've a long overdue look at the wonderful Vectrex on page 18, while an intensive eight-page article that tells you everything you need to know about Zenobi Software begins on page 30. But that's not all. Indeed, we're just getting started. John's Gaming Illuminati journey concludes on page 54, there's an in-depth look at the sprawling *King Of Fighters* franchise (with exclusive new art drawn especially for us by the esteemed Falcoon) on page 64, while Sony Liverpool reveal some fascinating information about the original *WipEout* on page 78.

Phew, I need a lie down after all that.







CONTENTS

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES

INSIDE
At-a-glance retro sections…









CONTENTS

ESSENTIALS

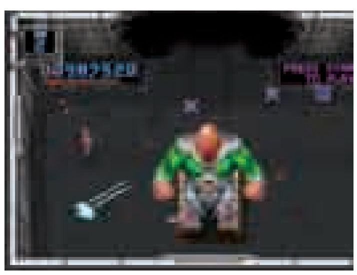
THE DEFINITIVE: **CONTRA**

40 STUART CAMPBELL IS BACK WITH ANOTHER DEFINITIVE. THIS TIME IT'S KONAMI'S CLASSIC RUN-'N'-GUN FRANCHISE.



THE MAKING OF...

60 HOW ON EARTH DO YOU GO ABOUT CREATING A FOLLOW-UP TO *ROBOTRON: 2084*, ONE OF THE GREATEST ARCADE BLASTERS EVER MADE? EUGENE JARVIS HAS TWO WORDS FOR YOU: *SMASH TV*.



RETRO RATED

THE GAMES LISTING...

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it





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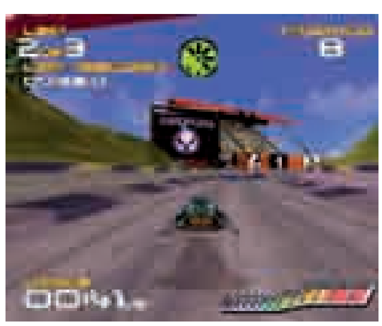
p96



THE HISTORY OF

THE KING OF FIGHTERS

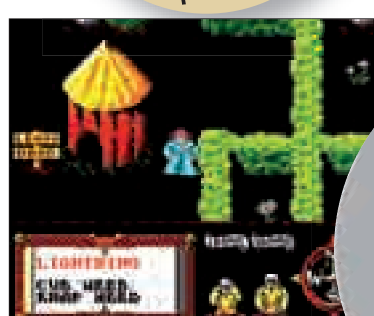
64 If you thought that 2D beat-'em-ups began and ended with *Street Fighter* then prepare for a new challenger.



THE MAKING OF...

WIPEOUT

78 In an exclusive new interview, Sony Liverpool talks to Retro Gamer about its influential futuristic racer.



THE CLASSIC GAME

FEUD

82 *Feud*: A complete load of rubbish or misunderstood genius? Retro Gamer investigates…

RETRORADAR

THE GUIDE

What's hot this issue…



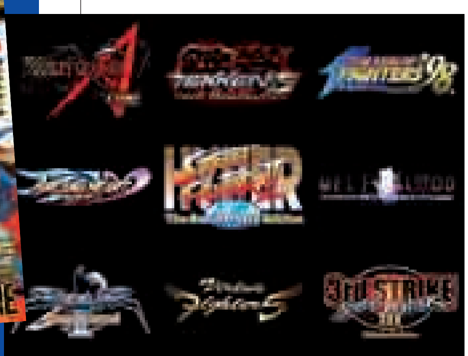
Arcadia magazine sponsors the annual tournament, with some people even referring to it as the Arcadia Cup.

WORLD'S LARGEST FIGHTING GAME TOURNAMENT

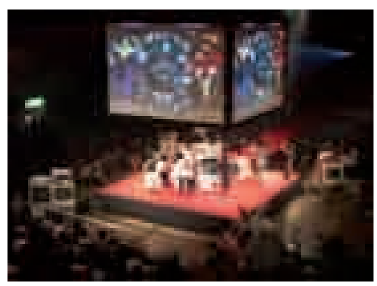
TOUGEKI – SUPER BATTLE OPERA 2007 LINEUP ANNOUNCED

The annual Japan-held Tougeki, or Super Battle Opera tournament, is hailed as the biggest and the best videogame fighting tournament in the world, with unprecedented displays of refined beat-'em-up skill. The games line-up for the 2007 tournament was announced on 27 December. 1 on 1: *Arcana Heart, Soul Calibur 3, King Of Fighters '98*. 2 on 2: *Hyper Street Fighter II, Melty Blood*. 3 on 3: *Guilty Gear XX, Street Fighter III, Tekken 5, Virtua Fighter 5*. There is already a tremendous amount of hype among fighting fans, though announcements regarding local preliminaries only begin at the end of February, with actual rounds commencing around April. The full tournament starts in the summer.

With all non-Japanese competitors being annihilated in the first round of last year's tournament, there is hope that this year British contestants will put in a stronger performance. Search for "Super Battle Opera Matches" on YouTube to bring up some impressive videos. The event is sponsored by Japan's Arcadia magazine, with prize money given to the champions. The finals are in Tokyo. More coverage as things develop.



There's something for everyone in this year's selection of games, including for retro fans.



An image from the *Guilty Gear XX Slash* final, at Tougeki 2006. What an intense fight that was!



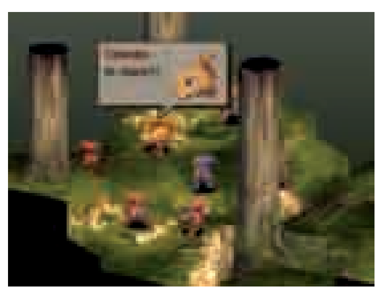
Although these photos from past events are small, it's apparent just how many people flock to this renowned event.

DRAGON QUEST TACTICS

SQUARE-ENIX SHOCKS JAPAN WITH DRAGON QUEST IX, AND NEW FFT GAMES

Dragon Quest is one of the most popular series in Japan, and every system that has been graced by its titles has gone on to win that generational war. The Famicom, Super Famicom, PSone, and PS2 all benefited from having *Dragon Quest*. Therefore it's significant to find that *Dragon Quest IX* won't be console-based, instead coming to Nintendo's DS. The game has an all-star development team: Yuji Horii will again helm the story and design work, Akira Toriyama returns as lead artist and character designer, while renowned composer Koichi Sugiyama will again be creating the music. Additional development work will be done by, Factor 5, the same company behind *Dragon Quest VIII* and *Rogue Galaxy*. Speculation is rife that this tactical move to the DS signals everything from the end of console gaming in Japan to Nintendo's domination of the industry. Further intensifying fan reaction is the announcement that it will feature real-time action instead of turn-based battles.

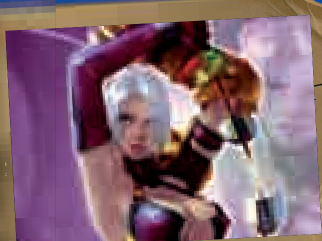
Speaking of tactics, Square-Enix has announced two new *Final Fantasy Tactics* games. The first is *Final Fantasy Tactics: The Lion War* on PSP, which is a remake of the original PSone game with additional content. The second is *FFT Advance: Hoketsu No Grimoire* on DS, which is a sequel to the GBA title. Both were announced in Japanese magazine Shonen Jump, and while we can't show scans, they are available on Kotaku.



While there is skepticism about the new combat system, and surprise at the host hardware, it's almost guaranteed that *DQIX* will sell millions and millions of copies.

Following this SRPG-based news is the fact the company's PSP strategy game, *Jeanne d'Arc*, has been released in Japan with a Western release planned for 2007. American multi-format magazine Play described it positively as being a lot like *Final Fantasy Tactics*, which is regarded by many as the pinnacle of SRPGs.

HERO OF THE MONTH



IVY ISABELLA VALENTINE

Every month, Retro Gamer looks at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's one of the stars of *Soul Calibur*

First appearance: *Soul Calibur*

Distinguishing features: Kinky fetish clothing, breasts

Weapon of choice: Snake Sword

Most likely to: Wear nothing but a thong into battle

Least likely to: Settle down and have kids

Unusual fact: She was originally evil but, wracked with guilt, turned to the side of good and vowed to destroy the Soul Edge

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 17: LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS 2



One of the most lascivious titles to grace a mainstream videogame, *Leather Goddesses Of Phobos 2* featured a far less salacious loading screen. Not regarded as highly as the text-only predecessor, it maintained a playful tongue-in-cheek sense of humour.

JUST IN A PORT OF THE ORIGINAL CRAZY TAXI IS COMING TO SONY'S PSP, WITH THE SUBTITLE FARE WARS. IT WILL BE BOLSTERED BY A MULTIPLAYER MODE.

DREAMCAST IS DEAD

THE END OF AN ERA





There were high hopes for a Dreamcast port of the astounding beat-'em-up *Melty Blood Act Cadenza*.

In a move that's saddened Dreamcast and NAOMI shmup fans, Sega will be ceasing proprietary GD-ROM production in February 2007. This would bring about the end of both NAOMI arcade hardware and the Dreamcast as a supported system. While it's possible to develop games and have them run from CD-ROM, these would not be endorsed by Sega. This means ports for games such as *Melty Blood* and *Senko No Ronde* will be cancelled. This is also problematic for small Japanese developers, since NAOMI hardware is one of the cheapest arcade systems to develop for, and allowed cost-effective creation of niche titles. A written petition was started, but at this time there is no information regarding its success.



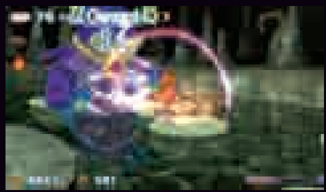
It's strange to imagine that no one will ever be making games for the NAOMI board anymore.

NIHON FALCOM GLORIOUSLY RETURN

EXCITING NEW FALCOM TITLE HEADED FOR THE PSP IN ENGLISH!

It's been a long time since a Falcom game has hit Western shores, especially one of high quality, but this looks set to change with the release of *Gurumin: A Monstrous Adventure*, out in the USA on 13 February. It's an unmistakably retro-style title, with an atmosphere and blithe sense of wonderment which hasn't been seen in videogames for over a decade. Although a port of Falcom's previous PC title, *Gurumin* looks set to be one of the best action RPGs on the system, and it should hopefully signal the release of further Falcom games in the West. Check out the official site for more in-depth information and videos: www.gurumin.us/. There's no word yet on a UK release, but we wait in hope. This is on Retro Gamer's Top Ten wanted list for 2007.





The game's styling is very reminiscent of Hayao Miyazaki's work. It truly is a magical and wonderful little game, by retro-RPG masters Nihon Falcom no less!

ATEI REPORT

RETRO GAMER RELIVES ITS GAMING PAST IN A LONDON ARCADE

Long ago, when arcades ruled the world, gamers would part with their precious shillings to get their first taste of new videogaming delights, before playing pale imitations on their humble Speccys and C64s several months later. A visit to this year's ATEI show (Amusement Trades Exhibition International) held at Earls Court at the end of January, proved that in 2007 the reverse is true.

Retro Gamer spied coin-op versions of *Pro Evolution Soccer* and *Far Cry* amongst others, the latter sporting two hefty gun turrets. Most impressive was the *Mario Kart* setup – four cabinets linked together allowing much shell-shooting skulduggery – which we hope will be resident in a sanitised Namco World near you soon.

The industry is not averse to plundering its own past either and updates of *After Burner* and *Chase HQ* were also on display. The latest incarnation of *Outrun 2* garnered much attention, though the big queues meant we didn't get to see how the twin-seated cabinets actually played. Or maybe we were distracted by the booth babes, kitted out in full F1 racing gear and urging drivers on in dulcet Essex tones.

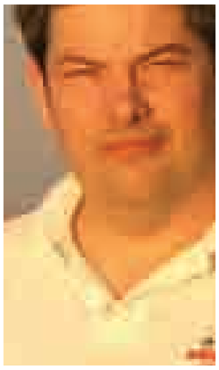


The *Pong* fruit machine, a shilling a go…

Of course, the arcade section was dwarfed by the array of gambling machines, including some huge horse racing and roulette affairs. We did find the *Hello Kitty* grabber machines cute, but we smiled most at the *Pong*-themed fruit machine. We're keeping our fingers crossed for a *Space War* fruitee next year.



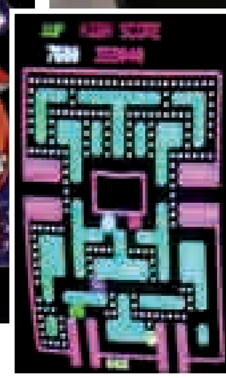
Relax in this comfy chair, half price at the DFS sale…





» *Granny And The Gators* with questionable tag lines.





» *Baby Pac-Man* in all its, er, glory.



» **Top right:** Inside my granny, so to speak… **Right:** An incredibly rare *Baby Pac-Man* bartop version of the gamel.

COMMENT

THE MISSING LINK!



» *Granny And The Gators* when it was actually working.

The games industry has come a long way since its 'Big Bang' back in 1971 with the release of *Computer Space* and *Pong*, and yet I've witnessed its dramatic evolution producing all sorts of genetic variations and offshoots along the way.

Let me explain… with videogames it's just about possible to see their entire evolution from that 'Big Bang' and chart how they have quickly evolved through the mid-Seveties Black and White games that featured simple instinctive and predictable behaviour, to more complex programmable microprocessors designs that were capable of rudimentary decision-making, and all this happened by the mid-Seventies.

Then towards the late Seventies early Eighties we see an explosion in variety as primitive processors adapted using dedicated hardware circuitry to look after more complex functions such as sound, speech and even hardware collision-detection, leaving the central nervous system to apply more processing power to the gameplay logic. Through those years many genre-defining strands of games design branched off in their various directions, evolving into new breeds.

Over the next 20 years, this trend has been evolving at a fantastically fast geometric rate, way above any other industry humans have ever applied their ingenuity to. Modern consoles like the 360 are so powerful that if compared to anything from 20 years ago the power ratio is probably millions of percent more capable.

And throughout all the those 30-odd-years of game evolution, numerous game styles have evolved and split off down their own path in the hope of becoming the new most successful genre of game DNA. But whilst we have many successful game styles maturing quite nicely today, there have been a few notable disasters that have fallen away into obscurity, just like the animal kingdom.

So, after all that intro waffle, I want to highlight a couple of game disasters notable for their particular strand of bizarreness, and shine the spotlight on them for the briefest moment in time once more, lest they disappear from the history books for ever.

The 'missing link' I want to discuss is when pinball and videogames almost cross-bred. The games in question are the ill-conceived 1982 Midway game *Baby Pac-Man* and its close relative *Granny* And The *Gators*.

Yup, both these Frankenstein's monsters were horrible attempts by Bally/Midway to marry videogames to pinball machines. And sure enough they didn't live long enough to survive in the wild more than a few months.

With *Baby Pac-Man*, it tried to link the recognisable *Pac-Man* game style shown on a video screen in front of you, to a pinball machine below it. The idea was to avoid the ghosts and guide your munching Pac-Man to escape through maze tunnels at the bottom of the screen, and enter the pinball side of the game. This was necessary because in this version *of Pac-Man* the ghosts were very quick and there weren't many yellow dots to eat either. When in the pinball half of the game you became a ball bearing being flipped about hitting targets and spelling bonuses that would enhance the video side of the game. You ended up back in the videogame when

"I WANT TO HIGHLIGHT GAME DISASTERS NOTABLE FOR THEIR PARTICULAR STRAND OF BIZARRENESS, AND SHINE THE SPOTLIGHT ON THEM FOR THE BRIEFEST MOMENT" ARCHER MACLEAN



» Two old relics stashed together.

the pinball drained down the middle lane like any other pin, and then hey presto the videogame came back to life, altered by whatever you'd done, 'down below'. Oh err.

It's interesting to play once, and to show other people, but only really memorable because it was just so 'odd'.

Bally / Midway followed this half-breed up with the 1983 *Granny And The Gators* – a catchy title if ever there was one. *Granny* followed a similar combination of video-screen above a small pinball playfield below, only this time you guide a badly animated granny who for some reason is rowing a boat up some river inhabited by hungry crocodiles and spear throwing-monkeys. Every now and then you get to guide Granny into the pinball world below to earn more power-ups. You return to the river of death just as soon as your pinball drains. I guess the bloodthirsty jungle inhabitants weren't too bothered about the age of their dinner, as most games like this might these days feature babes in distress with not very realistic wobbly bits.

Both games shared similar hardware of amazing complexity spread over half a dozen circuit boards packed with way too many over-heating logic chips and linked by dozens of cables all prone to falling out and getting dry joints with all the heat being generated inside the game. This mass was so complex that its reliability killed it off about as quickly as the lack of sales.

Now, having slagged both off, I have to make an admission. Yup, this dinosaur went hunting and tracked BOTH these games down some years ago. I'd seen them in books and decided to find them. Both came from the states. The thrill of the hunt was definitely more fun than trying to get them to work and play them, but I pride myself on being one of the few people on the planet daft enough to want to put them both side by side and take a photo. I never did get the *Baby Pac-Man* fully working, but the *Granny* did come to life, right after a double chip replacement, only to keel over due to excess heat 20 minutes later.

After that, I just kinda lost interest and got annoyed with myself for ever spending good money on such evolutionary relics, and sold both off. Naturally I scanned the artwork to preserve forever more in the Arch archives of classic arcade game renderings. With the money raised I bought a really nice restored *Twilight Zone* pinball and have never looked back in anger.

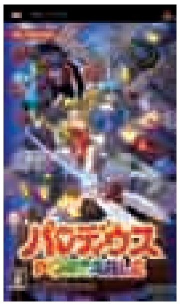
ARCH

SMASHING SHMUP SHENANIGANS

KONAMI GOES HIGH-RESOLUTION SHMUP CRAZY

Konami has just announced a variety of shmup-based compilations, that will be available in Japan on Sony's PSP – which again reinforces how great the PSP is for retro gamers.

First on the list is *Twinbee Portable*, which will contain several *Twinbee* titles, including *Twin Bee Da!* which came out on the Game Boy. Interestingly this enhanced version will feature high-resolution graphics and will make full use of the PSP's wider screen, but without scaling which would ruin the visuals.



Next is *Salamander Portable*, which, again, contains past *Salamander* titles in a compilation. What will excite fans though, is the addition of titles such as *Xexex*, which until this point has never had a home-port! Very exciting.

Finally there's the recent release of *Parodious Portable*. As the name implies, the *Parodious* games are *Gradius Parodies*, and feature all manner of madness, such as bunny girls riding on rockets and firing carrots and malevolent pigs. It's crazy stuff!

All of the above come with dinky little PSP skins which customize the system with imagery of the chosen game. It's like a tattoo, except for plastic machines and it's made out of paper. We believe the kids today call these things "stickers." All games also come with the expected variety of options and taté modes. No word yet on any of these reaching the West.

But enough of all that nonsense, since only Darran cares about archaic shmups – what we really want to know is when the hell is Konami going to release the *Suikoden 1+2* PSP compilation in English? Bring us *Suikoden* Konami, or bring us your wives (and when we say wives, what we really mean is *Suikoden*).



» Look, it's *Twinbee*! Did you know Koji Igarashi of *Castlevania* fame once programmed a *Twinbee* game for the PC-Engine? It's true!

THE END OF ONE OF JAPAN'S INTERACTIVE VISUAL NOVEL COMPANIES

KINDLE IMAGINE DEVELOP GO BANKRUPT

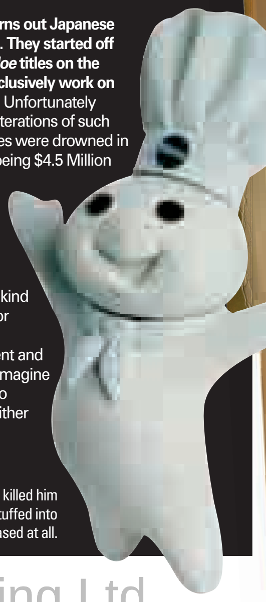


» From *G.I. Joe* on the NES to *Memories Off*. What a change!

Informed by our ever affable news allies at Insert Credit, it turns out Japanese games company Kindle Imagine Develop has gone bankrupt. They started off in the early 1990s, creating games such as the first two *G.I. Joe* titles on the NES, and other classics like *Pepsiman*, before going on to exclusively work on anime-based interactive visual novels such as *Memories Off*. Unfortunately Japan's predilection for gratuitously salacious and fetishised iterations of such software meant that Kindle Imagine Develop's family-safe titles were drowned in the market place, selling poorly and leading to the company being $4.5 Million in debt, and finally filing for bankruptcy.

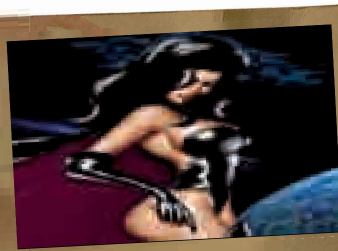
Retro Gamer remembers when it had four-and-a-half million dollars, once, but we sadly fell in with a bad crowd of Bolivian nude supermodels, and promptly wasted all the money on a series of soggy brown-paper bags, filled with dead effigies of the Pillsbury Doughboy. It became an addiction, and you can buy a lot of such paper bags with that kind of money, especially from the right underworld criminals. Poor Doughboy; poor Retro Gamer.

If only we hadn't frolicked amongst society's most decadent and depraved, we would now have the funds to purchase Kindle Imagine Develop along with all its IP. And then, publish alongside Retro Gamer, a series of interactive visual novels. Or perhaps not. Either way, it's always sad when a company goes bankrupt.



» He didn't look so disturbingly pleased after we'd killed him with bees. And his brethren. And had their bodies stuffed into soggy brown-paper bags! Not pleased at all.

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



DARK QUEEN

VILLAINESS OF THE MONTH

Without a bad villain there would be no good heroes. What would the Ninja Turtles be without Shredder? What would Wolverine be without Sabertooth? Rubbish, that's what. This month: Dark queen

First Appearance: *Battletoads*

Distinguishing Features: Wearing tight latex, being wicked

Weapon of Choice: Presumably a whip and stilettos

Most likely to: Tie you up and flog you mercilessly

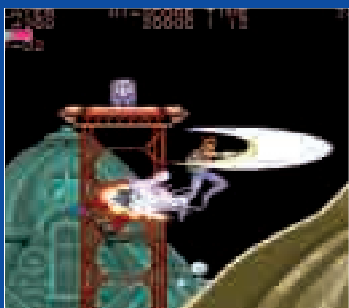
Least likely to: Play at being a switch

Unusual fact: She's 6ft tall, weighs 126lbs, and enjoys long walks on the beach. Not.

retro GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

Just because Retro Gamer looks to the past that doesn't mean that there aren't games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing suitable games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list.



MARCH 07

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION VOL 2

Released: 23 March

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £19.99

Format: PS2, Xbox

We've already gotten our hands on this nifty little collection (check out the review on page 91) but you're going to have to wait until the end of the month. Fear not though as this is a cracking compilation and not just because it features *Strider*. Filled with beautiful presentation and some truly great games this is more than a worthy follow-up to the PS2 original.



MARCH 07

SNK VS CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS

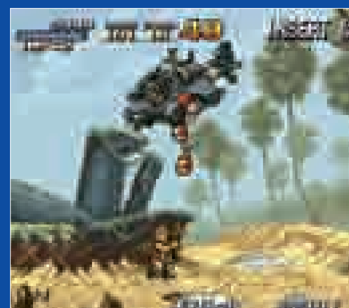
Released: 23 March

Publisher: Ignition

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

As great as the original Neo Geo Pocket version was, we're expecting the DS outing to be even better – mainly due to the fact that it will be fully controlled via the stylus. Early reports suggest that this version is trickier than the original, but we're confident SNK Playmore has been able to retain everything that made the Neo Geo Pocket version such fun to play.



MARCH 07

METAL SLUG ANTHOLOGY

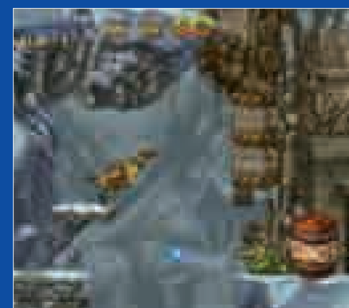
Released: 23 March

Publisher: Atari

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

It's disappointing that the release of this potentially excellent compilation has slipped, but when you consider that it's so SNK could include the recently released *Metal Slug 6* it becomes easier to deal with. The PSP version is now out (and very nice it is to) so it's just the Wii version we're waiting for now. Let's just hope that the UK version actually allows you to play with the Classic Controller...



MARCH 07

METAL SLUG 1

Released: 23 March

Publisher: Ignition

Price: £29.99

Format: GBA

More *Metal Slug* shenanigans, but this time it's the original and it's being ported to Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. In the past we'd have been a little concerned about SNK's premier franchise heading to the GBA, but after witnessing the superb *Metal Slug Advance* we have no worries. Providing the gameplay matches the impressive visuals, this could well be one of the GBA's last hurrahs.



MARCH 07

THEME PARK

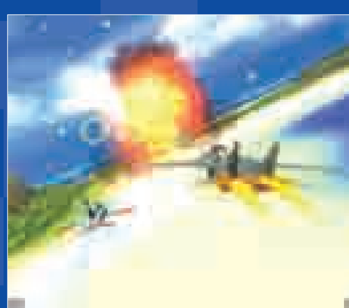
Released: 23 March

Publisher: Electronic Arts

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

Oh come on, how could this possibly fail? *Theme Park* was one of the greatest management games ever made and, judging by early screenshots, EA's Japanese team have perfectly captured the spirit of the original Bullfrog hit. We're giddy with excitement about *Theme Park* DS and are already predicting how effectively it will use the DS's stylus. We're already planning on putting extra salt on our chips to boost drink sales.



MARCH 07

AFTER BURNER: BLACK FALCON

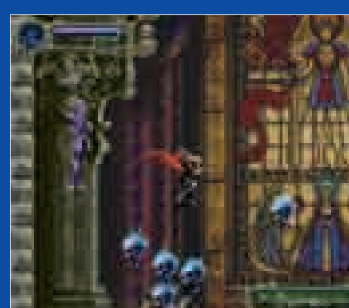
Released: 30 March

Publisher: Sega

Price: £24.99

Format: PSP

Not content with releasing *After Burner Climax* last year, Sega is busy putting the finishing touches to its PSP title. Whilst you once again take control of a F-14 Tomcat, the gameplay has been beefed up and promises a variety of missions. No news on whether the original will be included, but the developer, Black Moon Studios, has promised that there will be plenty of dogfights to take part in.



APRIL 07

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

Released: April

Publisher: Konami

Price: 1200 points

Format: Xbox Live Arcade

Very soon the vast majority of 360 owners will discover Konami's *Symphony Of The Night*. Ported from the PlayStation – surely this will open the floodgates to more great PSone releases? – *Symphony Of The Night* is the finest *Castlevania* title you'll ever play. No firm price yet (we're guessing 1200 points – roughly £10) but we'd happily pay three times that amount.



DECEMBER 07

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

Released: December

Publisher: Nintendo

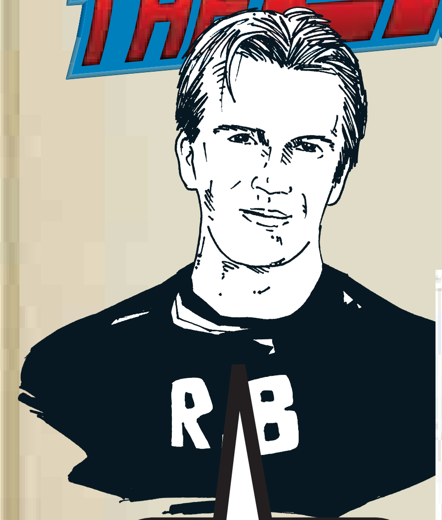
Price: £29.99

Format: DS

One of our most anticipated DS titles has slipped to December '07. While *Phantom Hourglass* features a similar graphical style to *The Wind Waker*, it's set to make full use of the DS's unique abilities and will allow for competitive play against another DS owner. With everything from Link's movement to combat being controlled by the stylus this could well be the most distinctive *Zelda* yet.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MARCH 1983



Dodgy power packs from Sinclair, dodgier computers from Texet, Micronet 800 is launched, two new computer magazines launch, the CTA are formed, Clive Sinclair is officially a young man and Psion sell a million. Richard Burton pokes around March 1983…


To all owners of Sinclair ZX Spectrum computers
URGENT

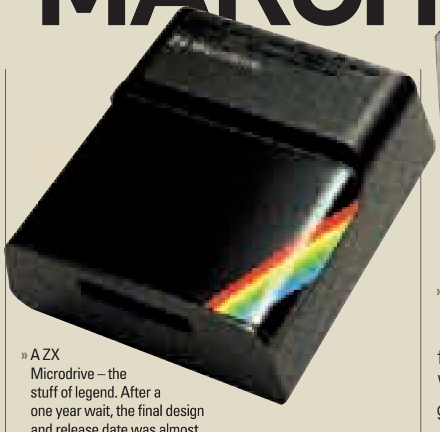
sinclair

» If your Spectrum power pack was going nuclear under the table whilst playing *Stonkers*, you might want to take note…

The last thing Sinclair needed on top of concerns for the growing backlog of unfulfilled mail order requests and the non-existence of its microdrive, were safety problems with its hardware. Unfortunately, that's just what it had with news that a batch of power packs would have to be recalled because of a wiring fault making them, potentially, dangerous.

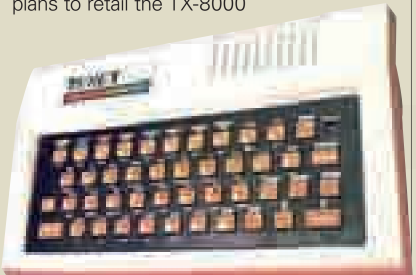
With the power packs already loose in the gaming wilderness, Sinclair liberally splashed adverts around various computing periodicals explaining the situation and asking for the offending hardware to be returned as it "might conceivably prove dangerous". Using the power supply as an under-desk foot warmer was not one of these risks.

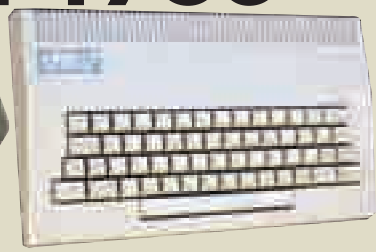
The ongoing saga of Sinclair's microdrive, the tape-spooled, cartridge-based storage system, came a little closer to conclusion with news that the final design had been confirmed and components were being ordered. The microdrive concept was revealed not long after the Spectrum was released, in April 1982, and had suffered setbacks ever since. Although the new microdrive would require rigorous testing before full manufacture could go ahead, it would still be a few months before the microdrives would actually be available to buy. Initially, they would only be available for those who pre-ordered and originally bought a Spectrum through mail order in the first few months of release. Once that had been sorted out it would be released through the usual retail outlets though, being readily available on the high street.


» A ZX Microdrive – the stuff of legend. After a one year wait, the final design and release date was almost upon us.

Another new system standing by to invade the burgeoning home computing market was the Texet TX-8000. The Texet machine cost £98, making it the cheapest colour computer available at that time. It was, shock horror, marketed as another direct challenger to the Spectrum's throne and featured several Spectrum traits including a rubbery keyboard and a Z80 processor.

Texet, the UK company distributing the Hong Kong-made machine, confirmed its plans to retail the TX-8000


» It's new, it's cheap and it's never been seen since – The Texet TX-8000. Stick to making calculators chaps…


» The Lynx had previously only been sold by mail order. Good system, no software.

from the beginning of April. Would it sell? Well, have you ever seen one? There you go then…

Yet another new computer elbowing its way into the marketplace was the Lynx by Camputers. Although the machine had already being available through mail order, major high street stores had started expressing an interest in stocking the machine. This was a good job really, as up to the end of February 1983, just 2000 machines had been sold.

With the introduction of so many new machines, there were always going to be casualties as superseded systems made way for the new brigade. The latest machine destined for a life of dust collecting in warehouses and attics countrywide was the 16K Oric-1.

With Oric International selling the 48K version in retail outlets such as WH Smith, who had ordered 12,000 units, the 16K version was restricted to mail-order sales only. In fact, there were so few 16K systems being manufactured that many customers purchasing through mail order were receiving 48K versions instead. WH Smith was once again leading the


» Hey, hey, 16K, what does that get you today? Nothing. Production of the 16K Oric-1 was slowly being phased out.



» Three of Bug Byte's titles for the BBC Micro. None of these were exceptional, but they were worth a play.

way with computer sales by expanding its range yet further with promises of more software and a wider range of systems for the forthcoming months. Amongst the new arrivals to the shelves of Smith's would be the Commodore 64 and the introduction of BBC software to its current stock.

Micronet 800, the new Prestel based database, was launched. The service would allow home computer users access to 30,000 pages of news and information, free downloads and the use of several new facilities including bulletin boards and Mailbox, an electronic mail program allowing you to send messages to other users on the network. A subscription would cost approximately £50 a year plus phone call costs and, of course, a spanky new modem such as the Prism VTX500, running at blistering speeds of up to 300 baud. Failing that, a crusty old acoustic coupler or two baked bean tins and some string would do.

Even in these pioneering early days of gaming and home computing, the question of software piracy and possible solutions to stamp it out were a hot topic for discussion. Whether little Jimmy was copying the latest Jupiter Ace game in the playground or a programmer was ripping off the graphics from an existing commercial game, there was a requirement for an Association to be formed… and so it was.

The newly-founded Computer Trade Association (CTA) held its first meeting this month, with Atari, Bug Byte and Lothlorien amongst its membership. One of the main concerns for the CTA was the growing prevalence of lending libraries that were springing up in the back pages of computer magazines.

This was further highlighted when a store in London offered a "buy and try" programme where purchasers of games could take them back within six months, for whatever reason, for an 80% refund. Although not condoning software piracy, it's not hard to see what the business plan was for the company. Bug Byte and Quicksilva, amongst others, expressed dismay and forehead vein-popping anger towards the scheme. A battle had seemingly begun…

The Guardian newspaper heaped praise onto Clive Sinclair by awarding the balding, bearded, computer guru their Young Businessman of the Year award. Not a



» Clive Sinclair, 42 and Young Businessman of the Year, looked like an old man even when he was young.

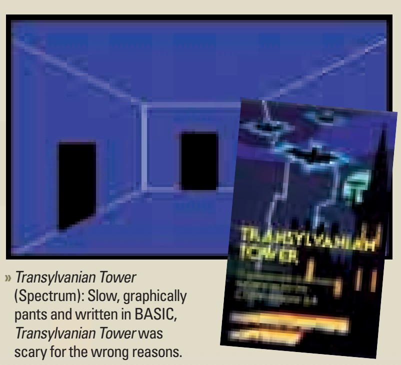
bad effort from the slap-headed youngster, who at the youthful age of 42, can now concentrate on investing more of his pocket money into other ventures.

More Sinclair related success, this time for Psion, the software house that supplies titles to the Sinclair Research software label. The company reported that it had sold its millionth cassette covering both ZX81 and Spectrum formats. Responsible for many of the Spectrum's early titles such as *Hungry Horace* and the *Horizons* introductory cassette, the company announced an annual turnover of £5 million.

The Hairy One, Jeff Minter, announced a deal with Salamander Software to convert several of the Llamasoft VIC 20 back catalogue. The first game under conversion was *Grid Runner*, which would appear on the Spectrum, BBC and Dragon 32. Groovy.

Quicksilva revealed it had done a deal with Pixel Productions to market its games across the ZX81, Spectrum and VIC 20 formats including titles such as *Subspace Striker*, *Harvester* and *The Trader Trilogy*.

Richard Shepherd Software revealed that its new game, *Transylvanian Tower*, was ready for release and would be on sale by the end of March. As with the majority of RSS games, *Transylvanian Tower* was written in BASIC and although receiving some praise from the computing press, the game played slower than a very tired snail on a strong course of



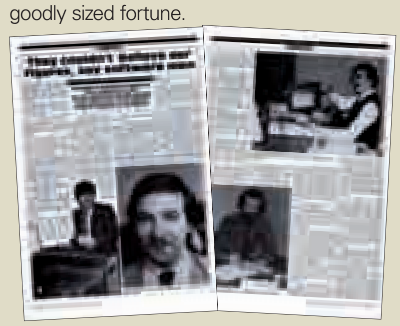
» *Transylvanian Tower* (Spectrum): Slow, graphically pants and written in BASIC, *Transylvanian Tower* was scary for the wrong reasons.

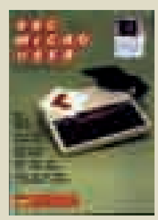
WHAT THE MAGAZINES WERE SAYING...



Home Computing Weekly

Only their first issue and already they had an interesting early interview with the fledgling software house, Imagine, who were steadily building a reputation and a goodly sized fortune.

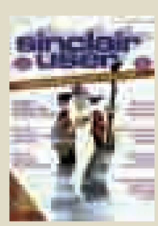




BBC Micro User

The first issue saw their first "Game of the Month", *Deathwatch*, which was a type-in. However, the game didn't look that shabby despite its origins. Other articles included "Build Your Own Games Paddle" and upgrading your BBC Micro A to a BBC Micro B. Nice.





Sinclair User

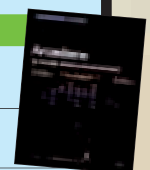
Sinclair User featured an article on the new wave of Sinclair-branded software, which, up to that point, had been disappointing. With new titles like *The Hobbit*, *Vu-3D* and *Inca Curse*, this was apparently enough to satisfy the reviewer, but really *The Hobbit* was the only quality title.



CHARTS

MARCH 1983

BBC



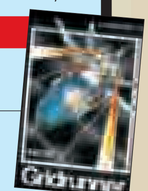
1. Arcadians (Acornsoft)
2. Planetoids (Acornsoft)
3. Colossal Adventure (Level 9)
4. Chess (Program Power)
5. Rocket Raid (Acornsoft)

SPECTRUM



1. Time Gate (Quicksilva)
2. Arcadia (Imagine)
3. Penetrator (Melbourne House)
4. Scramble (Mikro-Gen)
5. 3d Tanx (dk'Tronics)

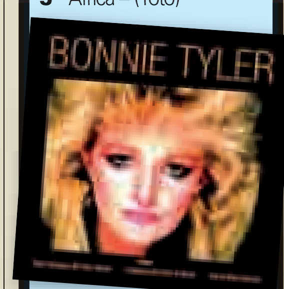
VIC 20



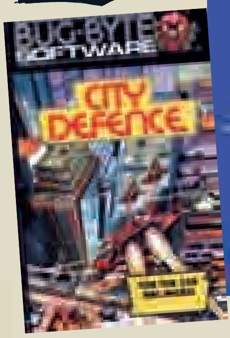
1. Grid Runner (Llamasoft)
2. Krazy Kong (Interceptor Micros)
3. Arcadia (Imagine)
4. Quackers (Rabbit Software)
5. Laser Zone (Llamasoft)

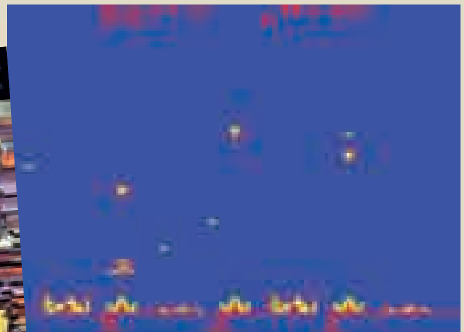
MUSIC SINGLES CHART MARCH '83

1. Total Eclipse Of The Heart – (Bonnie Tyler)
2. Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This) – (The Eurythmics)
3. Billie Jean – (Michael Jackson)
4. Rock The Boat – (Forrest)
5. Africa – (Toto)

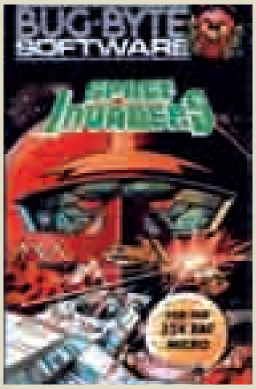




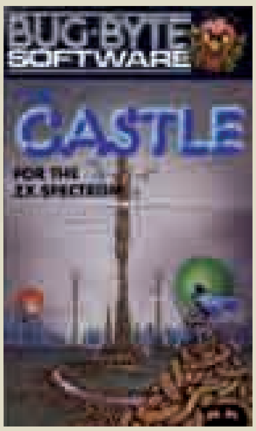




» **Above and right:** *City Defence* (BBC): This *Missile Command* variant from Bug Byte was not only a quick game but decidedly taxing.



» *Space Invaders* (BBC): Another new Bug Byte BBC release and as bog standard as they come. Nothing special and nothing new.



» *The Castle*, a text adventure converted from the Spectrum to the Oric – and Bug Byte's one and only Oric release.

Mogadon. It was initially available for the Spectrum with C64 and Dragon 32 versions not too far behind.

The Liverpool-based software house, Bug Byte, reported it was going from strength to strength with news they were selling a reported 30,000 units a month. It also revealed it was shutting down the mail-order side of the business as so many dealers and distributors were taking its products and orders by post had dropped by half.

It also announced its plans to move from its current premises, The Albany, to a larger building in central Liverpool, Mulberry House in Canning Place, sometime around the middle of the year.

On the software side of things, Bug Byte also had several titles ready for imminent release. *Space Invaders*, *City Defence*, *Music Synthesizer* and *Galaxy Wars* were to be released for the BBC Micro, whilst a conversion of Chris Cannon's Spectrum adventure game, *The Castle*, for the Oric-1, was also ready for release. For the Spectrum, it had *Spectres* , which was yet another *Pac-Man* clone. All Bug Byte really needed now was a block-busting platform game…

A new magazine was available for users of the BBC micro, the shrewdly titled, BBC Micro User. Featuring a mix of technical articles, gaming and type-ins, it was a welcome addition to existing reads of Acorn User and Paul Barbour's Laserbug.

Being the first issue, BBC Micro User took the chance to highlight a few of the better games that had been released over the previous few months, which included the likes of *Frogger* (A & F



» *Frogger* (BBC): A & F's *Frogger* clone was a good conversion. Getting past the traffic was nigh on impossible.

1983

NEWS MARCH 1983

A long time ago in a country far far away there was a President called Reagan who, on 23 March, announced to the world America's new Strategic Defence Initiative, later shortened to SDI and later dubbed by the media as Star Wars.

The aim of SDI was to install a defensive shield in space that would protect the USA from in-bound missiles by intercepting enemy warheads by destroying them with a particle beam.

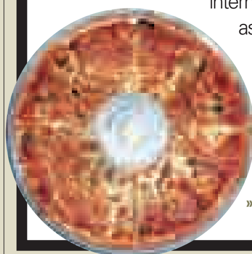
SDI signified a new low between the US and Soviet Union and hastened another round of the Arms Race, although analysts believe the crippling financial pressure on the Soviets to keep up with this technology helped hasten the break-up of the USSR. The SDI project was finally shutdown in 1993.

Overall, it turned out to be quite a month for Ronald Reagan. 8 March saw him cause an international incident when he remarkably referred to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire". If nothing else, he kept the *Star Wars* theme going for a while longer.

After four years of development between Sony and Philips, the Compact Disc finally made its debut as a music medium in the USA on 2 March. CDs were already available in Asia as they had been introduced a few months previous.



» Apparently Mr Reagan instructed NASA to build a Death Star and an Imperial Shuttle too…



» The deep-pan triple cheese CD was one variant that never quite took off due to stereo jammage and excess cheese stringification.

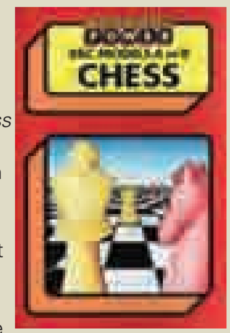


» Monsters (BBC): Acornsoft's new release accounted for much time wasting during primary school maths lessons.

Software), *Space Pirates* (Bug Byte) and *Hyperdrive* (IJK).

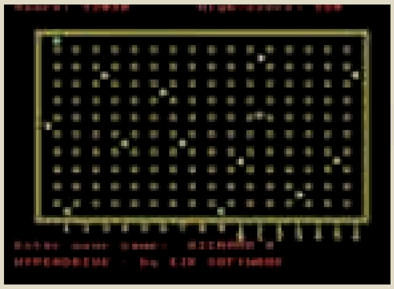
Another magazine making its debut this month was Home Computing Weekly. With a nice combination of games reviews, latest news, type-ins and the lighter side of hardware and programming, it was something of a breath of fresh air after years of technical driven magazines. HCW was ideal for the gaming technocabbage and new computer-owner alike.

Being a multi-format publication HCW covered a multitude of new software releases for a variety of formats. *Winged Avenger* (Workforce, Spectrum), *Monsters* (Acornsoft, BBC Micro), *Myriad* and *Skramble* (Rabbit Software, VIC-20) and *Chess* (Salamander Software, Dragon 32) all rated fairly highly. However, the one stand-out title was the latest release from Imagine, the fast and furious shoot-'em-up, *Arcadia*, released simultaneously on the Spectrum and VIC-20.

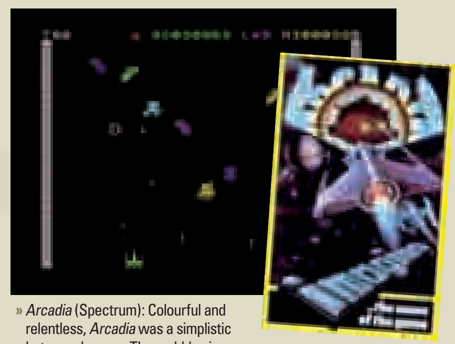


» You can probably imagine what *Chess* was like. It wasn't exactly inspiring stuff, but was a decent chess-sim nonetheless.

The March issue of Personal Computing Today also featured reviews for an all-embracing selection of micros. There was *Timegate* (Quicksilva) for the Spectrum, *Chess* (Program Power) for the BBC, *Buck Dodgers In The 25th Century* (The Software House) for the VIC 20 and Robot Nim (A& F Software) for the Acorn Atom.



» *Hyperdrive* (BBC): IJK's maze shooter game was a simple affair but very addictive.



» *Arcadia* (Spectrum): Colourful and relentless, *Arcadia* was a simplistic but superb game. The wobbly pins level was hard though...

ALIENS

"GAME OVER MAN, GAME OVER!"



- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **RELEASED:** IN-HOUSE
- » **GENRE:** RUN-'N'-GUN
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £35+ PCB BOARD



HISTORY

Eagle-eyed readers will no doubt remember that we covered *Aliens* back in Issue 33, but don't worry we're not going mad… we just wanted to show you Konami's superb vision of James Cameron's hit movie.

Released four full years after the original film and home computer efforts, Konami's take on the sci-fi masterpiece dispenses with the horror theme that worked so well in the various 8-bit games and instead turns the classic movie into a frantic run-'n'-gun through hordes of the vicious xenomorphs.

Taking on the role of Ripley (and Hicks when a second player joined in) your aim was to rescue Newt and kill the alien Queen that's threatening to repopulate the planet with her alien spawn. We're not quite sure what the xenomorphic matriarch has been eating, but it couldn't have been good as she spawned a constant supply of bizarre-looking creations, which greatly differed from those in the movie. Granted, there's always going to be a bit of artistic licence in videogames, but the vivid colours that Konami used were more than a little nauseating to look at – and don't even get us started on the aliens that could fly!

Fortunately, Ripley and Hicks were more than equipped to deal with the aliens Konami threw at you and had a variety of hi-tech weaponry that ranged from flamethrowers and three-way plasmas to devastating screen-clearing bombs. Perfect for running through the scrolling, multi-tiered levels.

If the above sounds familiar, then it's probably because *Aliens* is essentially *Contra* in all but name. Hardly surprising really when you consider that the popular series is also by Konami, who willingly admitted taking inspiration from *Aliens* when *Contra* was first released back in 1987. Hell, there are even 'into the screen' sections that feature the two heroes hurtling forwards in a heavily armoured AVC.

Konami gets a licence for a movie and bases it on its own game, which in turn was based on the original movie licence. It's an irony that Alanis Morissette would be proud of.





Year released: Japan: June 1983, US: November 1982, UK: May 1983

Original price: Japan: 54800 Yen, US: $199.99, UK: £149.99

Buy it now for: £50-75

Associated magazines: None

Why the Vectrex was great… Vectors have never gone out of fashion. They were cool in the Eighties, and they are still cool today as witnessed by games such as *Geometry Wars*. They have not aged with time like many other graphics, their sharp pinpoint definition and almost hypnotic phosphor glow a lure drawing you closer. The games behind them were pretty good also, with a level of quality today that just keeps going up and up. To not Vectrex is to be incomplete.

VECTREX

UNTIL 1982 ALL HOME SYSTEMS HAD ONE THING IN COMMON: THEY OUTPUTTED A RASTER DISPLAY. THE VECTREX, IN ITS SLEEK BLACK EXTERIOR, WAS ABOUT TO CHANGE ALL THAT. MAT ALLEN TAKES A LOOK AT A CONSOLE THAT HAS ARGUABLY GAINED IN POPULARITY WITH TIME, AND IS NOW CONSIDERED AN ESSENTIAL PART OF ANY GAMING COLLECTION.

The Vectrex when you look at it in today's gaming environment is a complete aberration: different to anything that came before it or has come after it. Whilst there are a few other examples of the display/machine hybrid, it is the only one to stand out on its own right, and the only machine to offer a dedicated vector-based gaming experience. The fact it also had one of the shortest life spans of any machine makes it doubly interesting. If you thought the Dreamcast didn't have that long of a commercial life, then pity the poor Vectrex which was dead within 18 months of its launch. Yet today it has such a cult following, and a home-brew scene second in size to that of the Atari 2600.

The men primarily responsible for creating the Vectrex we love today were Jay Smith and Gerry Karr. Smith had a long and detailed technical background that started whilst working on the Apollo space program. "I was really a gadget maker, and not too long after that, I went to work at Mattel Toys," he states. "We got into making electronic toys, and from electronic toys to videogames, which were just coming onto the scene."

Smith was also head of two companies that are often labelled together as Smith Engineering/Western Technologies, which for the further purposes of this article are abbreviated to SE/WT. The real break for Smith came with the Microvision, which was picked up by Milton Bradley (MB) for distribution in 1979. It was whilst dealing with MB that Karr met Smith; Karr would later work on the Microvision before being hired for what would become the Vectrex project and be responsible for much of the technical design.

"We really didn't have any idea at the time that this would become a classic. What we were trying to do was push the envelope, move it to the next level, do something unique, make your contribution that way, and provide another outlet," admits Smith. Vector machines such as *Asteroids* and *Tempest* were popular in

Larger Vision

Not only was Jay Smith responsible for designing the first vector home console, he also designed the world's first portable machine, the Microvision. Unlike modern incarnations such as the Game Boy and PSP, the Microvision was just a hollow shell with buttons and an LCD display. The real grunt of each game was present on the changeable cartridges; they didn't just contain the 2k of ROM holding the instructions, but also housed the actual processor.

If you think this sounds like a strange way to do things, then you'd be right. The whole idea of the handheld was way before the technology existed to do it proper justice, especially considering the screen resolution was a mere 16x16 pixels. By the time Milton Bradley canned the project two years later there had been 11 releases in the US and seven in Europe. Today a good condition Microvision is hard to find given it often suffers from the ravages of time.





THE VECTREX WHEN YOU LOOK AT IT IN TODAY'S GAMING ENVIRONMENT IS A COMPLETE ABERRATION

REX



the arcades and Karr recalls "… part of the initial design specification and push to sell was to produce a device capable of emulating *Asteroids*." Continuing the portable theme, the idea for a handheld device was formed and a prototype was built with a one-inch screen using a supply found by hardware designer John Ross, though in hindsight it was incredibly hard to achieve logistically given the short distances involved with deflecting the dots from the plates inside the CRT.

Towards the end of 1980, so it is told, workers from SE/WT found a supply of five-inch monitors going cheap and it was decided that the new vector project was going to be based upon this display instead. "There were really only two iterations of design. The original concept was for a device called Mini Arcade. It was a five-inch screen, much smaller and less capable. We ended up licensing it to GCE, in a different configuration, but quite similar to what it looks now. As we were on a short schedule, and we had control over the design, there was constant evolution right up to production. At any one time, it was prototyped what was there, but conceptually it didn't vary a great deal," states Smith. By the end of the year the general design of the machine was almost complete and Smith began to look for potential investors.

"We optioned the product to Kenner, who were the ones to do the *Star Wars* products. Kenner thought about it, and thought, and thought, and this all occurred in the winter of 1980, spring of 1981. Finally in the summer of 1981 they decided no, it would not be popular, would never go. They gave it back to us in around July or August, and we went to a guy called Ed Krakauer, who was the key guy for Intellivision at Mattel and then left to form his own company called GCE, or General Consumer Electronics."

Krakauer saw the potential for the machine immediately. "Ed was really quite a visionary, and he took a look at it and said, 'Great, that's wonderful, if it could have a bigger screen, I'd really be interested.'" Hence in place of the original five-inch screen, the final design encompassed a nine-inch screen instead.

The "Mini Arcade" name was not exactly catchy in the eyes of the marketing people (and apparently the name of another already existing product), and so a suitable replacement was sought. After a brainstorming session, programmer Tom Sloper came up with the name "Vector-X", which was eventually contracted to the name we know today.

"And so by September or October we were in fully swing with a plan to do a games system and 12 games, and have them all ready to show by June 1982, which was about nine or ten months away. So in the ensuing ten months we developed the entire games system, the operating system for the game, 12 games that were showable at CES, and that was the birth of Vectrex."

In that time, a number of design points were nailed down, such as the screen orientation, the control system and the overlays. "The Vectrex has a vertically orientated screen instead of horizontal. This was was so it didn't look like a TV. By orientating it vertically, it gave it a different look, and it had its own value as a game."

Smith continues to remember the choices made over the joystick. "How did we decide it was an analogue joystick or a digital joystick, and why was it on the left instead of the right? The placement of the joystick wound up being from a discussion if you were flying an F14 or whatever the fighter was at the time, the pilot's hand is on a flight stick in his left, and the throttle in his right. So he does all the flying control with his left hand."

"THE VECTREX HAS A VERTICALLY ORIENTATED SCREEN INSTEAD OF HORIZONTAL. WHY? THE REAL ANSWER WAS SO IT DIDN'T LOOK LIKE A TV SET" JAY SMITH



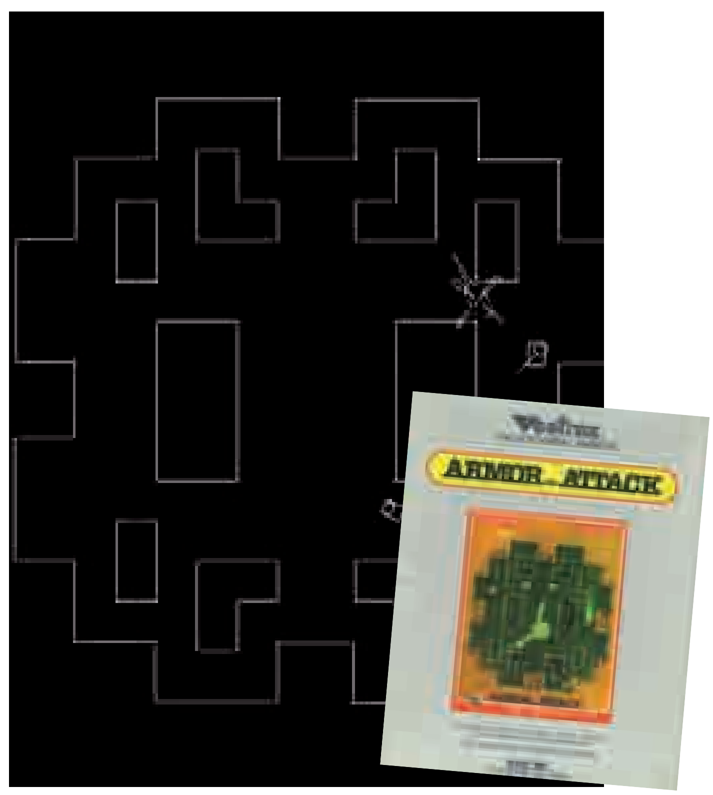
» Probably the best of the three dimensional games, this one showed off the true nature of the headset.



» Gateway to a new dimension of games playing. Or so they claimed.

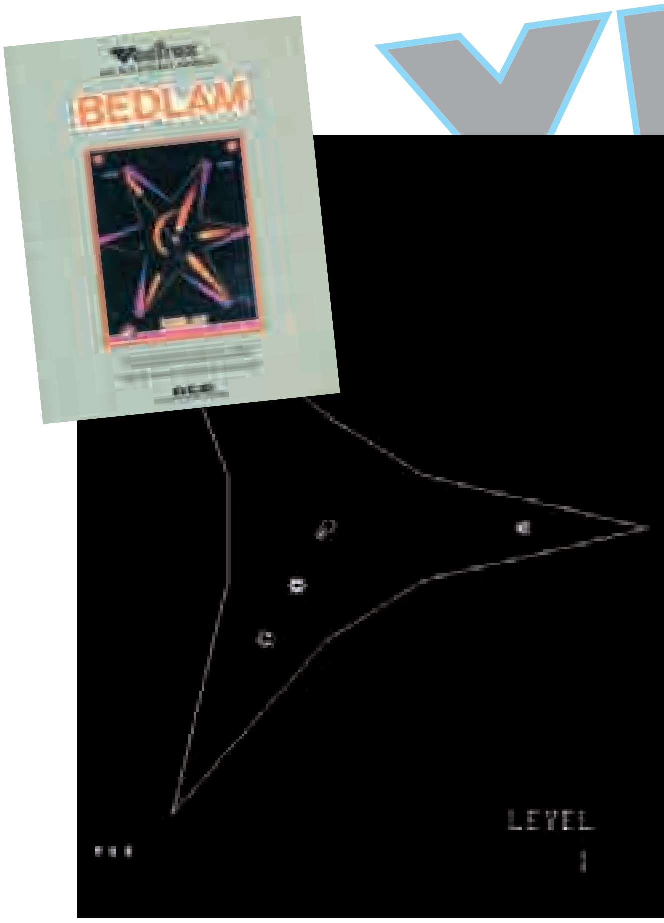


» The *3D Imager*. It promised so much and was never able to deliver on it.



» *Armor Attack*. Like many Vectrex games, this could be played as two-player co-op. Take on the might of tanks and helicopters with just a jeep. Nothing like making it easy.

VECTREX



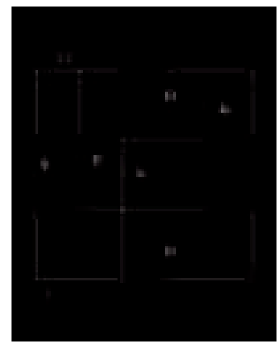
» *Bedlam*: Easiest way to describe it would a reversed *Tempest*, your ship is in the middle and the enemies attack from the outside.



» How are you going to sell the console when it appears the player is more interesting to watch than the game?

» Using cute manga girls to sell product in Japan is an age-old tradition.





» *Berzerk*: A very competent conversion of the *Stern* arcade apart from slowdown with lots of robots.



» *Blitz*: Go on you Os, you can beat the Xs now!

The size of the joystick unit was based purely on the fact that the unit was as wide as it was, and it needed something that size to fit the slot at the bottom. Which is why there were also four buttons to use, and was also the reason why analogue control was present; there was the space and it needed to be filled. Almost all consoles since the Vectrex have had the pad/stick on the left, and in further terms of pioneering, the Vectrex was also the first console to have a dedicated analogue control as standard.

It wasn't all easy going. Smith recalls, "Another big problem along the way was that it was a TV set, and had a lot of digital circuitry in it. The screen with all these electrons running around didn't go well with the digital circuitry at all, there was a lot of moving around, shielding, but we got through it."

In the midst of the hardware finalisation, there needed to be some games to play on it. Paul Alan Newell, Mark Indictor and John Hall were pulled off an Atari 2600 reverse engineer project and assigned to writing games or develop the internals for the launch of the Vectrex instead. Joining them were placement appointees Bill Hawkins and Chris King, who were students at Georgia Tech, and Duncan Muirhead who had just dropped out of a course at UCLA. All six were assigned to write the first batch of games pencilled in (*Minestorm*, *Scramble*, *Armor Attack*, *Star Trek*, *Berzerk* and *Rip Off*) that was later expanded to 12 by the time the console was to be shown at the Chicago CES in June 1982.

Many of the early titles came from Cinematronics, with WT/SE striking a licensing agreement that allowed full access to each other's games. The source code of many of the arcade machines was fully available to the Vectrex programmers, and Cinematronics had the option to release any of the original Vectrex games it liked as full arcade versions (which it eventually did with *Cosmic Chasm*).

Included with each game was the final component, a hard plastic overlay to attach to the front of the unit. The marketing department decided that the black and white display would not be as appealing to the general consumer and it needed an injection of colour. Newell especially was never happy about them, and there was always a rift between some of the programmers and those advertising the machine regarding the policy. Hawkins once joked that they had thought about coding messages into each game stating, "for improved gameplay, remove the overlays"!

Smith comments about having a game included with the console, "At that time most Atari cartridges were done in 4k, with some adventurous cartridges getting up to 8k. The system ROM that ran the machine was put in 4k and the original game that was included with the unit was put in the other half of an 8k ROM. So the included game required no cartridge. Everything was in one ROM within the unit." However whilst Hall and Karr had worked together on the system ROM (called the Executor), when Hall was assigned to write *Minestorm*, the eponymous *Asteroids* clone, Karr felt that the module needed rewriting from scratch.

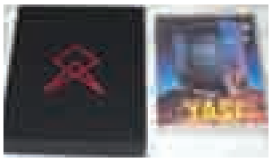
After a successful showing in Chicago, the Vectrex was eventually released in November 1982 in the US for the reasonable price of $199. Following good reviews and press, it sold modestly well and looked to become another success for Smith. It was also around this time that another player was becoming interested in entering

Boston Out

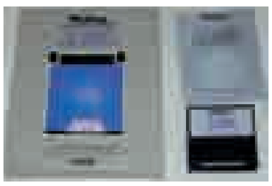
A special version of *Clean Sweep* that was co-produced with the Mr. Boston Liquor Company. *Clean Sweep* itself was a *Pac-Man* variant where you controlled a vacuum cleaner sucking up all the money in the maze whilst pursued by the threatening pincers of doom, though the vacuum only had a certain capacity meaning it had to be emptied every so often.

The new version replaced the vacuum cleaner with the company's symbol, a top hat, and the title screen featured an advert for Mr Boston Liquor products. It was almost certainly never commercially available but was handed out as a promotional item. One copy known to exist is complete with the box and overlay, so the company went the whole hog in producing the full set of pieces. It is, however, the hardest produced cartridge to find as only two others have been found, making this a prime candidate for some high bidding should another one turn up on eBay.




» The delicious *Protector* and cunning *YASI* games from Alex Herbert.


» A variety of other home-brew titles available for the Vectrex.


» A proof of concept program written by Paul Alan Newell and duplicated for sale at CGE 2003.


» *Hyper Chase*: A game very much in the ilk of *Turbo* and other such racers.

"WHEN DID THEY STEP INTO THE FRAY? JUST ABOUT WHEN THE WHOLE BUSINESS TANKED!" MIKE CARTABIANO

the console market properly as Smith comments, "In late '82, GCE began negotiations with Milton Bradley, who bought the whole product line, put it out in force for 1983. They did TV advertising, they actually went up directly against Atari and Intellivision, when in retrospect they should have gone for a niche game or a specialty game, something that a kid could take to his bedroom."

Now Mike Cartabiano comes into the picture, who would work on much of the product development and promotion for the console at Milton Bradley. He had met Smith during the Microvision period as he had just started at MB as a design manager. His thoughts about that time are quite dry humoured and blunt, "Coleco were right down the road from Milton Bradley, so they had to step right into the fray. When did they step into the fray? Just about when the whole business tanked! They had cash but not much brains."

But they had bought the Vectrex and the games, the packaging, and they also decided that this would be a great product for Europe, because at the time Atari, the Intellivision and Colecovision had made a big impact in Europe. MB had a large operation over there, with factories in Ireland and Germany. They shipped a load of Vectrexes over to Frankfurt I think, did some testing and got a great reception over there. People went wild over it in Germany."

MB had the means to distribute and advertise the Vectrex properly worldwide, something up until that point GCE would never have been able to contemplate. Whatever can be said about MB's handling of the console in general, in hindsight without them this wonderful little machine would probably have been stuck in the US and not be as popular as it is today.

Cartabiano naturally has his own scathing critique on the internal promotion of the Vectrex, "So they said now we're going to play with the big boys, but instead of doing it the right way, like get people who knew what the game business was about, who knew how to play games and how to sell games, they gave it to their toy salesmen, who had no interest in pushing this product. So they found themselves facing some sale challenges, meanwhile the business in general was getting very competitive, there was a glut of product."

Whilst the Vectrex was being rolled out in Europe, MB sold the rights to distribute the console in Japan to Bandai, who would label it as the Kousokusen over there. Although the 11 available games were sold at a reasonable price of 4,800 Yen each (around 25 pounds today) the machine never took off, which was an indicator back then of how Japanese attitudes to Western technology have not changed when viewing the similar performance of Microsoft's consoles today.


» The inner workings of the only colour version of the Vectrex.

During 1983 a number of new products were developed, most that never made it to market and two that did. A colour Vectrex was designed, the process of which Smith recalls vividly, "It was a serious proposal to put it in a regular Vectrex case, and the TV tube had two layers of phosphor. The obvious thing to do is make it into a colour TV, but it was three times as expensive because instead of one gun providing a point you had to have three guns for RGB. You had the mask on the tube, the tube was more expensive, the electronics were more expensive; it was out of the question cost wise. This was a Vectrex that had two layers of phosphor on the tube, a red layer and a green layer, and you ran the electron gun into the CRT at two different voltages, 18,000 and 25,000 volts."

However the best laid plans and all that: "Nice concept, worked well, except that going from 18,000 to 25,000 volts was too time consuming. And at 30,000 volts you burn a hole in the tube. If you look at the colour Vectrex [the sole prototype is always on display at CGE] you will see it has a nice little hole burnt in the phosphor!"


» The Japanese version of the Vectrex sold by Bandai.


» A complete boxed set of Kousokusen games.





» **Left:** Point and move and draw and play, the hardware was quite accurate. **Right:** Admittedly adverts seemed so exciting back then.

VECTREX



» A pay-per-play timed version of the Vectrex hardware that sprung up in bars and the such on the East coast.

Aside from scrapping the idea for a colour version, Cartabiano recalls other concepts that fell by the wayside. "Internally we loved this thing. We came back with ways to blow this thing out, be competitive, and keep us in this business. So we started on several campaigns, one was to take the basic technology and start to expand it. Jay was working on colour technology and a couple of other things so we left that to him, and we looked at the peripherals and we started making some of the same mistakes the other guys were doing. So we had developed a full QWERTY keyboard, and overlays for that, and a musical device that could play really bad music with speaker systems that could plug into it in really odd places. Then we had a voice recognition module… we actually built a prototype for a baseball game on Vectrex, to call a pitch and a few other things, and played really badly."

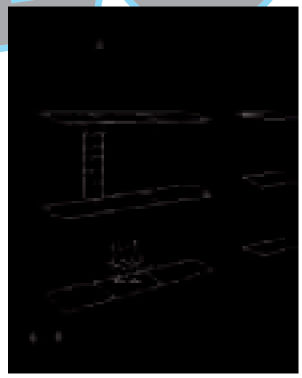
The two peripherals that did make it to sale were the lightpen and 3D Imager. The lightpen was a natural introduction given the technology available and the facilities of the Vectrex itself. Contrary to popular belief, the pen itself is actually a receiver, with the screen being scanned invisibly to find where it is positioned. As the joystick ports have a voltage line, this provided the input needed to power the pen itself. Three titles were released to take advantage of the device and it was met with reasonable success.

The 3D Imager is an interesting device mainly because as a piece of technology over 20-years-old, it still works amazingly well and is still one of the best examples of 3D imaging thanks to the efforts of designer John Ross. Thankfully to save having to use the old hardware and/or spend a lot of money acquiring it (originals sell for over 150 pounds usually), a modern version has been developed in conjunction with new games taking advantage of what it can offer, namely depth of vision and colour. It's just a pity back then it launched dead, right at the start of 1984, and this is why the original





» *Pole Position*: Given the potential limitations of the hardware, not a bad conversion indeed.



» Help! Spike! Eek! Molly!



» Fortress of infuriating death at times more like.

is hard to find today. *3D Minestorm* included with the unit and *Narrow Escape* especially are pretty good in their own right.

"By 1984, Vectrex succumbed to the entire problem that overcame the whole videogame industry at the time." Smith's conclusive statement really needs no more comment. A few months into the year, MB closed GCE and started to sell off the remainder of its stock at cut prices, with the unit down to $49 and games $10 each in the US by the summer. All this was really in preparation for the takeover by Hasbro that occurred in the May. Stock that wasn't sold was apparently landfilled in Springfield, Massachusetts according to Cartabiano.

Four years later Smith had the idea to resurrect the console as a handheld, taking the concept to Milton Bradley. "The thought at the time behind that was Sinclair had put out a device they called the flatscreen pocket TV. We hooked this up and made a Vectrex out of it [the tube]. MB thought about it, finally decided it would have to sell for about $100-110, so decided no, it could never sell anything like that. About a year and half later the Game Boy came out!"

And with that the Vectrex could have remained this curio console from the Eighties if it wasn't for the actions of two individuals. The first was Smith himself, for upon MB liquidating stock and closing GCE, he obtained all the rights to the hardware and software back into his own companies and now makes them available in the public domain for non-profit use. The other was John Dondzila, the first person to write a home-brew game for the Vectrex as he recalls, "Late 1995 following the various Vectrex Usenet threads, one of the most popular subjects was always someone who was going to develop their own Vectrex RAMcart and code games for the Vectrex. I decided I wanted to be that someone and the rest is history." In his stead, others have since followed.

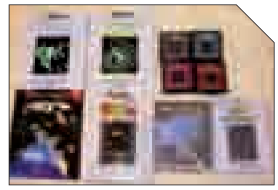
Today the Vectrex scene keeps getting stronger with more people discovering what it has to offer and a dedicated group of individuals producing quality home-brew titles (see boxout). For a console that arrived late and died so early, it has risen like a phoenix to become one of those "must have" pieces of hardware.



Home-brew Heaven

Given the Vectrex's small original library, it may come as no surprise that the home-brew scene is actually bigger by comparison. Since John Dondzila's first steps over ten years ago, the scene has developed into a vibrant, thriving community that constantly seeks to push forward the boundaries of the technology and what can be done with it. In return it has resulted in a dedicated voice synthesiser add-on, a replacement 3D Imager, flash memory cartridge and onboard battery saving.

But all this is nothing without the games. Such masterpieces as *Protector* by Alex Herbert, *I Cyborg* by George Pelonis, *Gravitrex* by John D, *Spike's Circus* by Alex Nicholson and *Nebula Commander* by Craig Akers are proof positive that today's developments are just as good, if not better, than those during the Eighties. Thankfully most home-brew is still available to buy today so go search the web and support these guys in their efforts!



http://www.vectrexcarts.com
http://www.vectrex.biz
http://www.furyunlimited.com
http://www.vectorzoa.com
http://www.madtronix.com
http://www.classicgamecreations.com



» The rarest and most valuable original release game available. Not bad to play either.

PERFECT TEN GAMES

The Vectrex only had 28 programs officially released for it, but over the years there have been some amazing home-brew titles coming out. Here's a selection of both…

SPACE WARS

» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **PUBLISHED BY:** GCE
» **CREATED BY:** GCE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *MINESTORM REVIEW*

01 **Everyone knew *Space Wars* would make the top ten list, since it's not only a great adaptation of a timeless classic, it's also the purest distillation of the multiplayer gaming ethic.** Even today it's great fun and, while an obvious choice, is a title every Vectrex owner should get. Gameplay is elegantly simple: it's you and a rival ship, turn left or right, fire, accelerate, and warp; two ships enter, one ship leaves. Terrific in one-player (thanks to some decent AI), it's unstoppable with a friend. It's a title with many clever touches, like bits of ships getting shot off and becoming debris, or the central star's gravity affecting your speed. Brilliant.

PROTECTOR

» **RELEASED:** 2003
» **PUBLISHED BY:** N/A
» **CREATED BY:** ALEX HERBERT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *YASI*

02 **The best Vectrex game of all time? The most important Vectrex game of all time?** One thing is for sure, this superb *Defender* clone grabbed the community by the proverbial balls when first previewed and led many to believe it couldn't possibly be done on the hardware. How wrong they were. Alex Herbert's seminal tribute to Jarvis' classic is just one example of the untapped potential the machine held and the control scheme was a perfect fit to the Vectrex design. Thankfully now available in unlimited format, the original limited-release with custom-box and overlay – of which there were only a hundred copies – has become one of the most expensive home-brews to acquire.



01



02

ARMOR ATTACK

» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **PUBLISHED BY:** GCE
» **CREATED BY:** DUNCAN MUIRHEAD
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** WEB WARS

03 **A rocket-firing jeep, enemy tanks, and a terrifying helicopter, which isn't bound by buildings on the ground, are all trapped amongst the rubble of a ruined maze-like war zone.** It may not sound like much, but this is a tense little action title backed up by some excellent AI. Shots can't travel through walls, so it becomes a game of cat and mouse as you attempt to outmanoeuvre the enemy tanks attempting to flank you. When hit though, tanks aren't always damaged – they can sometimes still move their turrets and return fire. Like the best videogames it affects the imagination, conjuring up images from countless war films.

SPACE FRENZY

» **RELEASED:** 2006
» **PUBLISHED BY:** N/A
» **CREATED BY:** JOHN DONDZILA
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *PATRIOTS, VECMANIA, GRAVITREX*

04 **With the Vectrex living such a short time and the wealth of vector arcade machines during that era, there are still opportunities to bring across to the home format.** John Dondzila's most current release is a homage to *Space Fury*, an obscure Sega/Gremlin title that took a lead from *Gorf* and gave you a taunting alien adversary. *Space Frenzy* as a game is almost identical to the arcade parent bar the colour and plays fast and hard in the traditional shoot everything on screen before it gets you genre, though also giving the player the opportunity to improve their shot power by docking with upgrades.

DARK TOWER

» **RELEASED:** N/A
» **PUBLISHED BY:** N/A
» **CREATED BY:** JOHN HALL
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *MINESTORM II*

05 **Technically not an official release since it never came out, though a prototype was later found, dumped, and is now available on most multicarts.** Regardless, it's one of the best games on the system and, interestingly, is actually based on a 1981 board-game by Milton Bradley. *Dark Tower* could be regarded as the system's first and only adventure RPG. The game has you wandering 3D fields of trees, opening treasure chests, avoiding tornadoes, and battling wicked mages. There might not be any saving, but it's a thrilling adventure and is still quite exciting now.



03

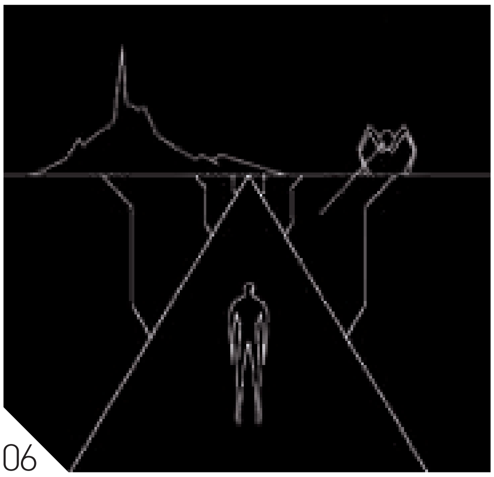


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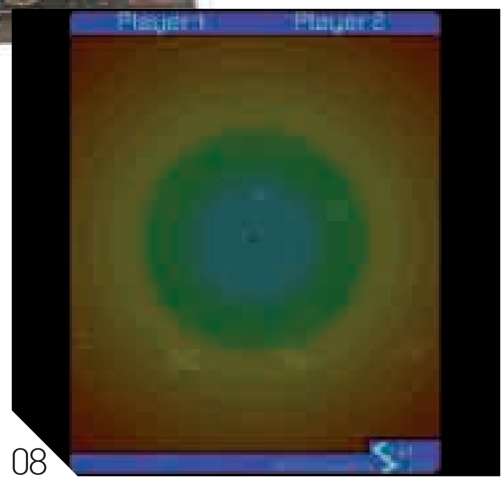




06



07



08

CYBORG

» **RELEASED:** 2004
» **PUBLISHED BY:** N/A
» **CREATED BY:** GEORGE PELONIS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *WAR OF THE ROBOTS, VECTOR 21*

06 One thing can be said about George Pelonis' output on the Vectrex, and that is it's not your average run-of-the-mill game idea. Everything he has done so far is just a little bit different, not something that has really been attempted in the past. I, *Cyborg*, whilst a name homage to a more well-known publication, is a highly challenging escape running game where you control the titular character in its attempt to break free of the prison he is locked inside. Unlike many other titles, this game fully uses the 32k memory space allocated and will keep most players occupied for a long time trying to complete it.

COSMIC CHASM

» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **PUBLISHED BY:** GCE
» **CREATED BY:** BILL HAWKINS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *CRAZY COASTER 3D*

07 *Cosmic Chasm* captivates our minds because, considering it's a game from 1982, there is surprising depth to it – like trousers which appear normal, but have infinitely long legs. The basic premise is that you're trapped underground, in a massive maze-like cavern, but have a map charting your progress, and each cave has both enemies which try to kill you, and also a massive expanding central core. Luckily, you have a shield, lasers, and a drill with which to break down walls blocking your progress. The goal is to reach the core, blow it up, and then make your way back out of the caves before a chain reaction blows everything up.

STAR SLING

» **RELEASED:** 2006
» **PUBLISHED BY:** N/A
» **CREATED BY:** ALEX NICHOLSON
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *LOGO, SPIKE'S CIRCUS*

08 Ever play *Quantum*? Most of you probably haven't, given it's an obscure low production run Atari coin-op. Alex Nicholson hadn't heard of it and yet managed to produce what would prove to be a natural evolution of the concept and a challenging game to boot. Floating in space, your little ship is equipped with a tractor beam and lasso type weapon, the object being to ensnare on-screen like-shaped entities to destroy them. At the same time, you must avoid colliding with the shapes by using the tractor beam to match their velocity to pull you along. It's hard to explain but it becomes easy to understand when playing. And very hard then to stop playing.



09

SPIKE

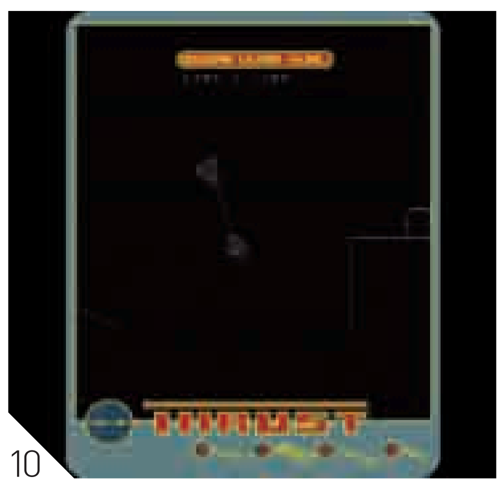
» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **PUBLISHED BY:** GCE
» **CREATED BY:** GCE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** N/A

09 *Spike* is an important game for many reasons. It's a platformer featuring a hedgehog, but one which isn't *Sonic*. It's also technically the only platformer on the Vectrex system. Then there's the fact that it has some awesome and unforgettable digitised speech – we chuckle every single time we hear "OH NO!" All this has led to Spike becoming something of an unofficial Vectrex mascot – and rightly so, since the game itself is awesome fun. It's essentially a clone of the arcade classic *Donkey Kong*, except slightly different. You need to use warping ladders to reach and collect a key, before climbing to the summit. You can also kick flying TVs which try to kill you. It's crazy!

THRUST

» **RELEASED:** 2004
» **PUBLISHED BY:** MARK SHAKER
» **CREATED BY:** VILLE KRUMLINDE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** N/A

10 After doing the rounds in the Eighties and being resurrected for the Atari 2600, this vector based classic finally made the transition to its most natural home only as recently as 2004. Taking inspiration from the C64 version complete with translated Rob Hubbard soundtrack, it not only perfectly recreates the original but goes beyond the design with an additional rock hard difficulty level and time attack mode that will test even the most hardened *Thrust* players. Words are inadequate to be able to praise this game highly enough, with just the right balance between learned progression and challenging frustration evident with every turn, thrust and shot. In fact, the ultimate tribute to Jeremy Smith's genius.



10

CANNON FODDER



» "I wanted to see exotic Vietnam... the crown jewel of Southeast Asia. I wanted to meet interesting and stimulating people of an ancient culture... and kill them."

It offended the Royal British Legion, enraged the Daily Star newspaper, was banned in Germany (brave enough to start two World Wars, but fearful of a little comedy violence?), and yet was loved by thousands of Amiga owners (and those who bought the ports). On the other hand, all Cannon Fodder did for Retro Gamer was to remind us of Vietnam. And damn, how we loved every second of it (the game, not Vietnam)!



» "Stanley, see this? This is this. This ain't something else. This is this. From now on, you're on your own."

Retro Gamer loves Vietnam war films – this should be evident from the number of references to "being in 'Nam" in articles. The Vietnam war is a sore point for America though, mainly since it shipped huge numbers of young men over there, drafted against their will, to be ground into hamburger by the communist machine guns of North Vietnam; around 60,000 American troops were killed. The reason for this, loosely summarised by us and wholly without any kind of fact-checking, was because of America's blinkered, maniacal, and frankly deranged fear of communism taking over Asia, and then the world! America hates communism, but it's probably not that bad.

Regardless, the British had little if anything to do with the war in Vietnam (probably because secretly, we're all a bunch of tea-drinking communists). This means we can not only enjoy 'Nam films with emotional detachment and mental impunity, but also enjoy anything which reminds us of these films; they're ace, and make for rousing action flicks. The hopeless insanity of *Apocalypse Now*; the brutality of *Full Metal Jacket*; the camaraderie and betrayal of *Platoon*. So many great movies set in the jungles of Asia, and all of them influencing our minds in the way we interpret the media. The entire team, back in the day, first encountered *Cannon Fodder* as fans of many such Namtastic movies. Hence why we love it so much, and it is without question a classic game. As the song says, War Has Never Been So Much Fun.

You start off in the jungle, with just two troops in your "mini-platoon", with the task of killing all enemies. Gradually the game expands, with up to eight troops who can be divvied into up to three squads, who are able to carry grenades and bazooka shells (essential for destroying enemy vehicles and buildings), plus you're able to control vehicles of your own, such as a jeep and skidoo. The skidoo is, of course, for the snow levels. The terrain soon changes, encompassing desert, ice, what appears to be British swampland, urbanised areas, plus underground bunkers and sewers. But the jungle stages define *Cannon Fodder*.

It featured an easy-to-learn, nigh-on perfect interface, which was natural, direct and responsive. Unlike so many other retro games, the mechanics are still smooth and precise, making it a joy to visit even as a newcomer. In an age where production values are stupidly high, even if the game in question is garbage, to find a retro title that is fun and has an impeccably high quality level, is quite rare; back in the day, it's understandable why people went crazy over it. It has to be said, though, that things could get infuriatingly tough later on (Jeep Jump, we're thinking of you!).

There are endless small touches to make you chuckle and feel that Sensible

"THE VIETNAM WAR IS A SORE POINT FOR AMERICA, SINCE IT SHIPPED HUGE NUMBERS OF MEN OVER THERE TO BE GROUND INTO HAMBURGER BY THE COMMUNIST MACHINE GUNS OF NORTH VIETNAM"

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN
- » **DEVELOPER:** SENSIBLE SOFTWARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **GENRE:** WAR
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10



» "We went back there and they had come and hacked off every inoculated arm. There they were in a pile. A pile of little arms."



» "The village, which had stood for maybe a thousand years, didn't know we were coming that day. If they had, they would've run."



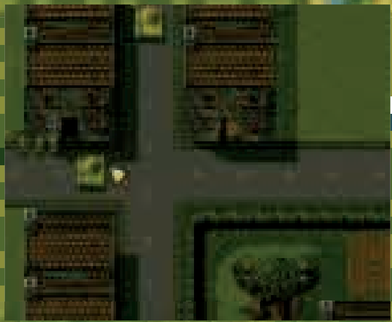
» "It's a way we had over here with living with ourselves. We cut 'em in half with a machine gun and give 'em a Band-Aid. It was a lie."

Software really cared about releasing a great game. The first time you kill an enemy, instead of simply letting go of the trigger and moving on, it's possible to hold it down, filling the body with more lead and making it writhe in multiple directions. Sometimes, after shooting someone, they don't die, and until you finish them off or they bleed to death, you can hear said enemy lying and screaming in agony. Meanwhile, various animals can be shot just for kicks! It's a game with a dark sense of humour, which proves highly amusing.

Despite its satirical nature, *Cannon Fodder* is also one of the most genuinely emotional games from the era; it affects you in a way few other war games have been capable of. After lengthy gruelling missions, having grown attached to your tiny troops, it's incredibly moving to lose one of the soldiers you first started with, such as Jops. Heightening the loss, is that his gravestone will haunt you forever and, if he notched up sufficient kills, will be listed as one of five fallen heroes, with his name immortalised on-screen. It won't have you crying, but for a videogame at the time it was astounding, and certainly brought about melancholy in a way which even current war FPSs fail at entirely.

It's not just that he's a high-ranking soldier who can move faster and fire further, it's the fact that you've grown attached to this tiny bundle of pixels. You've grown accustomed to him and Jools struggling through the rugged terrain, taking out "Charlie" with abandon and diplomatic immunity, only for one of the two 'Nam buddies to suddenly get hit by a random shot, dying in the other's arms. His massive grave (the size reflecting rank) then mocks you for the remainder of the game. Starkly though, it felt perfectly natural to send a sudden, new recruit, of low rank, whose name had not yet been seared into your mind, directly into the line of fire in order to sacrifice himself, kamikaze style, for the better good of the platoon, in any given level.

Even today, more than a decade on, we still get the insatiable urge after watching war films to dress up in replica military uniforms with ragged bandanas, and relive our *Cannon Fodder* days. War has never been so much fun.



» "Every time I think I'm gonna wake up back in the jungle. When I was here, I wanted to be there; when I was there, all I could think of was getting back into the jungle."



» "Hey, man, what happens in the field stays in the field, man. Everybody knows that, man."

SPECIAL THANKS TO LemonAmiga and Hall of Light for providing screenshots.

FOR THE OTHERS TO FIRE

There are often other versions of popular games, and *Cannon Fodder* is no exception. The original Amiga version would end up ported to the 3DO, Amiga CD32, Atari ST, DOS, Genesis, Jaguar, SNES, and also mobile phones. Most interesting though is the semi-remake for the Game Boy Color. Due to the limited hardware, the game has been cut down. For example, you can only control a maximum of two soldiers for any mission. To compensate for this, the levels have been tweaked slightly, making for an overall easier adventure. Although more gung-ho than the original, it's surprisingly great fun! There was also a sequel made, *Cannon Fodder 2*, which was designed by Retro Gamer's own freelancer, Stuart Campbell, during his days working at Sensible Software. Check his website for a full history of the development. Beyond that, there was *Sensible Soccer Meets Bulldog Blighty* (footy with grenades) and *Cannon Soccer* which reworked the snow levels. Finally, there was a cancelled PS2 update, and a recently announced PSP update.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

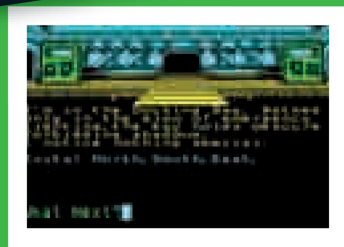
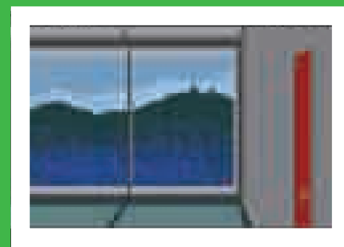
WIZBALL
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1987

WIZKID
SYSTEMS: AMIGA
YEAR: 1992

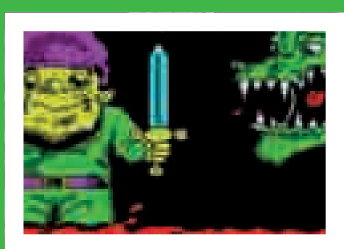
SENSIBLE SOCCER
SYSTEMS: AMIGA
YEAR: 1992

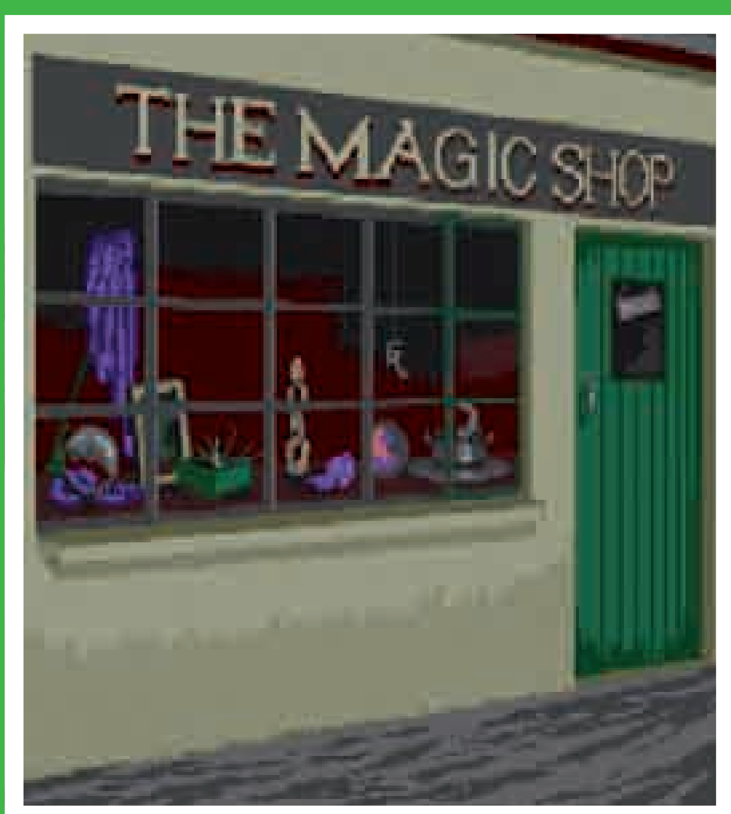


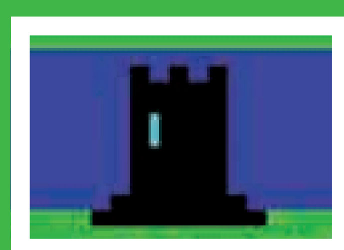
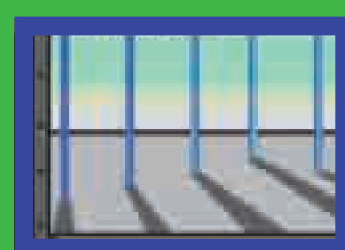
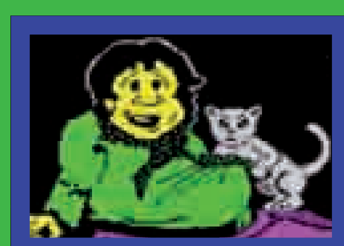
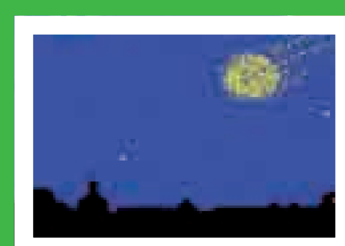
ZENOBI SOFTWARE


DAVID CROOKES CHARTS THE RISE AND FALL OF JOHN WILSON'S ZENOBI SOFTWARE



THE BALROG SPEAKS…

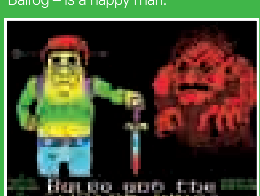
Go northwest. Examine Zenobi. Pick the brains of boss John Wilson. If you ever played a text-based adventure game on the Spectrum, then odds are you'll have tried one of the dozens of titles offered by Zenobi. David Crookes chats with the Rochdale Balrog.



Zenobi picks up first place in the Adventurers Convention awards of 1994 for Best Software House.

IN THE KNOW

Unemployed John Wilson has a chat about his future at his local Jobcentre and decides there and then he is going to set up a software house. Naming it Zenobi, John begins selling his own text-based adventure games for the Spectrum, later branching out and selling other people's work. Zenobi grows into one of the country's leading adventure game publishers. John – aka the Rochdale Balrog – is a happy man.



Bulbo and the Lizard-King, just one of the sixteen Spectrum releases by Wilson.

JOHN Wilson was scraping by. He was close to 40 and unemployed, his career in the RAF as an aircraft electrician long behind him. Now, he found himself sitting in a Jobcentre in Rochdale, having a face-to-face interview aimed at getting him back to work.

"What are your plans for the future?" he was asked. "'To write computer games and sell them mail order," he replied. And then the full weight of what he had said dawned on him. If he didn't go through with the plan, his benefits would be stopped. Either that, or the Jobcentre would force him to take any job they had to hand. With the agreement of his wife, Ann, already taken as a given, Zenobi Software was formed.

"The look on the interviewer's face was one to behold," laughs John, recalling the moment he made his future plans known. "After that, I just had to set up the company – if only to satisfy my own curiosity."

Owning his own software company suited John down to the ground. He was a huge fan of text-based adventures and here was an opportunity to devote all of his time to writing and selling them. And adventures games suited John. For while other genres – the shoot-'em-ups, the driving games, the puzzlers – required working knowledge of some sort of programming language, writing adventures did not.

Which was kind of lucky since John had no programming experience and therefore lacked any ability to code his own games. The large number of utilities available which allowed budding adventure writers to create their own games without needing to understand a single programming routine meant John's business could be off to a flying start.

In actual fact, John had already written a few text-based adventure games, including *Secret Of Little Hodcombe*. "It was my first commercially released game," he says proudly. "I wrote it at the same time as *An Everyday Tale Of A Seeker Of Gold* but completed play-testing *Secret* first. *Seeker* was then put on the back-boiler for a bit whilst I marketed *Secret*. The rest is history, I guess…"

John had no real hopes for Zenobi other than to earn a living. But he drew from his experience in dealing with other software houses when creating his own. Mastertronic had turned down a couple of his early games but Alternative Software actually wanted to publish a couple. Yet he recalled, most clearly, a firm called Smart Egg, a publisher which wanted to put together a compilation of his games *Seeker, Fuddo And Slam* and *Bulbo*. It was to be a neat package with a little booklet… but the royalties on offer were poor.

"It was one of the driving forces behind my decision to branch out on my own," he says.

For John, it was a new stage in his life. He had left school at the age of 18 to serve as an aircraft electrician in the RAF for five years. He left and spent 10 years in the building trade, first as a quantity surveyor and then as a contract manager.

But then he found himself redundant for the first time. Undeterred, he completed a 12-month radio and



The brains behind Zenobi, the Rochdale Balrog – aka John Wilson – in a shy mood.

television servicing course, obtained a City and Guilds with distinction and a credit and spent the next five years working as an engineer with Rediffusion before it closed down and he found himself sitting opposite a suited man at the Jobcentre. He had arrived home needing some sort of plan. In the end, he just did things his own way. Luckily he had a bible of stories swimming around in his brain.

"I have always been a story-teller and that seemed the ideal way to get the stories out of my head and into the public view," he continues. "I had played a few text-based adventures and liked what I had played, so it was only natural that I went along that path."

John had a belief that he could write games that were as good – if not better – than the adventures available at the time and he had a feeling Zenobi would be



Sean Doran created many loading screens for Zenobi, including this for *An Everyday Tale Of A Seeker Of Gold*.

ZENOBI SOFTWARE



A one-location game set in a toilet, the *Behind Closed Doors* series was hugely popular.

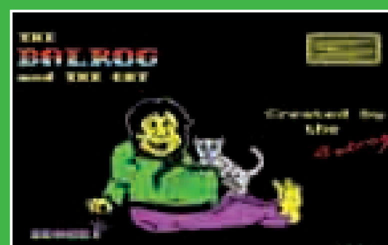
NO TEXT, PLEASE

Text-adventures died a death when advancing graphics and a growing demand for visual interactivity meant people tired of typing in commands. But with the decline in interactive fiction went some of the most involving stories known to videogaming. Games such as *Broken Sword* in which the player takes proper control of a character through a series of well-drawn screens became the preferred choice for many. But even the old point-and-click games seem to have had their day. As for John, text or graphics? "The 3D games like *Broken Sword* are nice eye-candy but comparing text adventures to it is a bit like comparing a book to a video… they are totally different things even if they are relating the same tale. In their own rights they are very good games and well written, but they are not for me."

"I USED TO DRAW A MAP OF THE PROPOSED GAME AND LIST THE RESPECTIVE ITEMS IN THE GAME. I THEN CAME UP WITH A BATCH OF MAJOR PUZZLES TO SOLVE" JOHN WILSON



Fuddo And Slam contained many magazine references.



Familiar John Wilson fare with lots of "toilet" humour.

successful. All he had to do was come up with the games. A difficult task? Not so, it seems. "Initially it was just a case of coming up with a nice title and then working from there," says John, who liked to go by the pseudonym, the Rochdale Balrog, a typical trend for adventure writers and fans of the time. "I used to draw a map of the proposed game and list the respective items in the game. I then came up with a batch of major puzzles to solve and finally tried to link everything into the finished article. This worked well for me in the beginning but eventually it became a case of finding a title, sitting down and writing it as I went along."

John favoured writing his games using The Quill Adventure System, a program created by Graeme Yeandle and published by Gilsoft in 1983. Yeandle was a huge fan of text-based adventures and he had created a game called *Timeline*. He found the process tedious, however, so to make the process of writing future games much easier, he decided to create an editor, which would take on the brunt of the work.

Using a text interpretation process known as a verb-noun parser, amateur adventurers quickly snapped up Quill, but it also proved popular with commercial companies. It helped to boost the number of games available, and text-only adventures – or interactive fiction as the genre has also come to be known – became increasingly popular during the Eighties and early-Nineties.

Yet the Quill had some limitations. For example, it didn't have a Get All command, which meant emptying everything you were carrying in a game would mean having to pick everything up again one-by-one.

John had fun with such restrictions. In *Fuddo And Slam*, which received an impressive rating of seven in Your Sinclair, he reminded players wanting to empty Fuddo's backpack that it just wasn't worth the hassle: "If Fuddo did that, everything would end up on the floor and being as how this game does not have a 'get all' option, he would have to pick them up again one at a time and that would take ages and ages… so if you don't mind, we won't okay!"

Such humour was thrown into the majority of Zenobi's titles. In *Fuddo And Slam* you could swap a copy of "Crush" magazine – no prizes for guessing which publication that was based upon – for a bag of sand.

Was that a sign? "No, a joke," he says. "I actually had a very good relationship with the magazines. Over the years I had run various help lines and columns in the likes of 'Soothsayer, Spellbreaker, Probe and Red Herring to name but a few and I was also in contact with the likes of Sinclair User, Crash, C&VG and ZX Monthly. I sent the newsstand magazines as many hints and tips for other adventures as I could and I would send review copies of all Zenobi releases."

Reviews for Zenobi games were favourable. John's titles – which were advertised in the various fanzines of



The visuals may have been simple, but they really helped to fuel the player's imagination.



Arrival on the Atari ST was another classic Zenobi title by Jason Taylor.





Whiplash And Wagonwheel – a creation by Clive Wilson and Les Hogarth – continued the graphical adventures published by Zenobi for the Atari ST.

the time including Adventure Probe and Spellbreaker – became known for their quirks and their great stories. John liked to include inputs which would yield responses but which would be irrelevant to the games themselves. Such hallmark humour from the Rochdale Balrog was evident in the majority of titles – even in some of those written by others. Your Sinclair adventure columnist Mike Gerrard recalled a time when he submitted his own adventure, *One Of Our Wombats Is Missing*, to Zenobi.

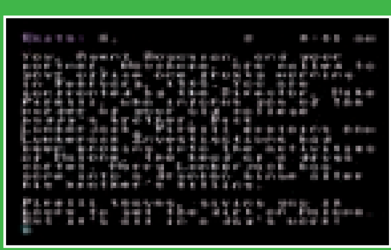
John noticed there was some memory still free and asked Mike to add a few incidental inputs. "John Wilson may have added a few himself for good measure," Mike told his readers. One of the most popular was the word Zenobi itself. If you type that word into the game *The Balrog And The Cat*, you get the response "miaow". Type Zenobi in *Behind Closed Doors*, and you are greeted with: "At this precise moment in time, she is sleeping soundly, with a belly full of pilchards and a rather large grin on her face!" a reference to one of his cats, also named Zenobi.

Aside from carrying such a glowing tribute to his pet, *Behind Closed Doors* was one of John's proudest moments. "I originally wrote it as a filler for 'Side B' of a major release and it was a complete departure from the norm because it all took place in just one location," he says. It was also written in less than a week, though the infamous "written in one day" tag is more of an urban myth than true fact."

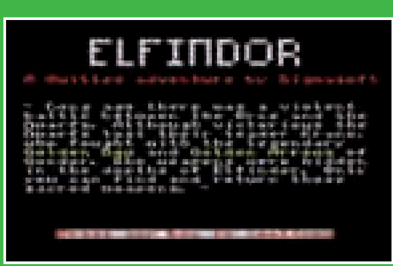
The game was so popular it sparked a trilogy, with each subsequent release also being located in the one room – the toilet. Although it sounded a rather restrictive premise, John's imagination was at the fore and he managed to pack in a lot of puzzles. By the third game the Balrog's bum was stuck to the toilet seat and the task was the help him escape while avoiding the nasty things lurking in the sewer below. Neat touches like the Goblin's Gazette being close to hand moved the narrative along.

If there was any criticism of Zenobi, however, it was that the software house would fail to explain which commands its many adventures accepted, leaving some players to stab around in the dark. The instructions, which accompanied the games were of little help, merely stating the games would understand the usual commands – giving no clues to novices unaware of what those usual commands were.

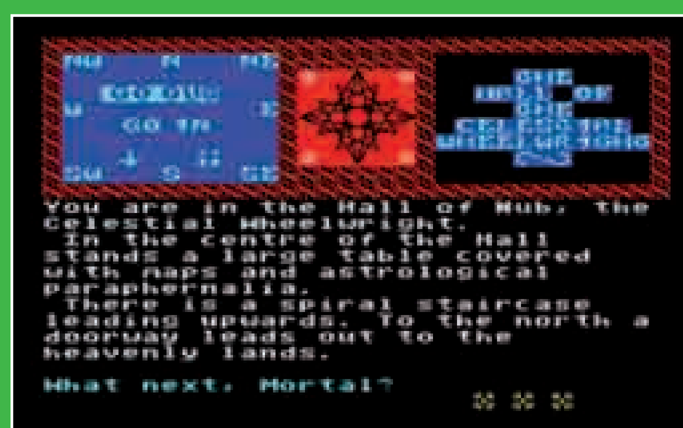
For those who knew what they were doing, however, the games were essential purchases and John became increasingly prolific. He eventually decided against meticulously planning each title, instead writing on the fly, making it up as he went along and letting his imagination take over. "Many times I had no idea where the plot was going next or whether anything would work or not," he explains. "So I spent more time playtesting the games than I actually did writing them. Once I had reached what I felt was a suitable ending I would replay the game from the beginning to see if it was solvable. If it was then I would replay



It might not be exciting to look at, but a screen of text (coupled with the player's imagination) knew almost no boundaries).



The excellent *Quill Adventure System* proved a great help for those with little coding knowledge.



Aurascope: one of two titles that Square Peg created for the Spectrum. The other was *Horrorscope*.

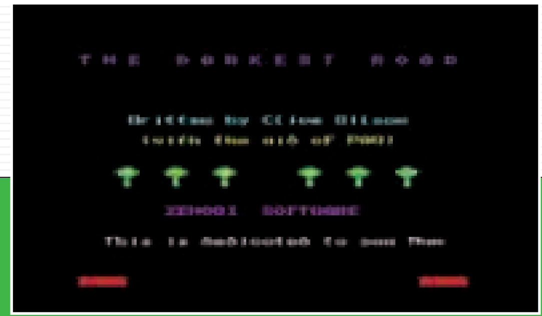
IN DEEP WATER

There have been many visitors to the home of the Rochdale Balrog, most of them welcome. But one day there was a knock at the door from a very smartly dressed man – with a strange enquiry. "Zenobi Software?" the man enquired softly as John asked him in. The man thrust a couple of sheets of green paper in John's direction: the Balrog's price lists. "Do you have any copies of *Deep Waters* left?" the man smirked as John pointed him towards 50 copies in a box being parcelled up, heading for a Dundee computer shop. "Does that box contain both volume one and volume two?" the man asked. "Sure does," John replied, "though for some unknown reason volume two sells better than Volume one". "People's tastes" the man grinned, as John handed him a copy of volume one. With that, the man left. He was from the Birmingham Vice Squad and had been visiting in connection with the distribution of pornography. Seemingly he had been sent an anonymous tip-off and thought the compilations of Jack Lockerby adventure-games (*Deep Waters 1* and *2*) were something else entirely!

"ONCE I HAD REACHED WHAT I FELT WAS A SUITABLE ENDING I WOULD REPLAY THE GAME FROM THE BEGINNING TO SEE IF IT WAS SOLVABLE" JOHN WILSON

COMPANY PROFILE

ZENOBI SOFTWARE

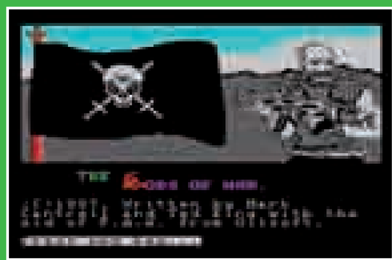


Most games were written using either Quill or Paw, the latter being used for *The Darkest Road*.

MISSING WOMBATS

When Mike Gerrard wrote *One Of Our Wombats Is Missing*, John was only too keen to publish it. After all, it was decent game, aimed at beginners.

But he says it was his biggest mistake – because it led to many back stabbers who took the opportunity to stick the knife into the Your Sinclair columnist. John says: "Mike wrote the game in all good faith and aimed it at the 'beginner' end of the market. It was his first effort and should have been judged as such. But certain people saw it as an excuse to get in some very caustic and hurtful remarks and generally cause a fair bit of ill feeling. All I can say to them is that it was the last game to sell in anything that I would consider to be reasonable quantities."



The Gods of War proved popular with Crash and received an impressive 86%.

it and do my best to trip it up. Finally I would send it out to somebody whose opinion I held in high esteem and ask them to give it a go. If all went well I would draw a loading screen, sort out a 'loader' and then compile a master-tape. All future copies of the game would be produced from this master."

John was certainly meticulous in his drive to ensure every game was as good as it could be. Even though he play tested his own games, he would also send them to a minimum of three people he trusted to give the title a thorough going over. Some games required around 10 to 12 testings before the Balrog was happy.

While John's reputation grew, he gained help from his wife who spent time duplicating leaflets, help sheets and adverts for him. That, however, was the extent of her involvement. Ann hates computers with a passion and has not even played one of John's games. "But she helped by never questioning any decision I made – no matter how it affected her and the kids," says John. "I was left to whatever I felt was necessary to keep Zenobi up and running, and Ann stood by me for all of it. Just what more help could you ask for?"

John's workload was certainly intense – just running the business was rapidly taking over his days. So he decided to move the firm to another level and take on games written by other authors. He says: "Eventually it became obvious that income from my own games was not enough to finance Zenobi. There was too long a gap between releases. So I decided to import other games and sell them under the Zenobi label. That way I would have a more regular income. So I read through the latest magazines and checked out the various reviews of independent releases. I selected one or two of them and approached their authors accordingly. Scott Johnston's *Lightmare: Village Of Delvhorn* was the end result."

Lightmare was greeted with mixed reviews for its unfriendly verb/noun parser – Crash giving the game just 54 per cent – but it marked a new direction for Zenobi. *Lightmare* also had beautiful presentation with many of the locations illustrated by a picture.

John, however, still preferred text-only interactive fiction.

"I never thought graphics were that necessary since a decent writer can 'paint' a good enough picture with the use of words," he admits. "I also found pictures tended to get in the way of the words although they were nice enough when they were well done like with *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde* or *Diablo*. Personally, the only graphics I ever needed were to be found on the loading-screens."

With other authors helping to fill out Zenobi's catalogue, John could devote more time to playtesting, duplicating, advertising and distributing the games. In a bid to encourage new authors to work with him, he ensured all of the costs were handled and paid for by himself. It also drew on his previous experiences with other publishers. "None of the authors ever had to put their hand in their pockets for anything," he says.

Initially authors received an advance payment in lieu of the first 500 copies of their game that was sold, but eventually, with sales dipping, that quota was reduced although advance payments were still always made. "All further sales were then paid for at an agreed rate per copy," explains John. "This varied between 30p to 70p depending on the game. These payments were paid out on a monthly basis and sent out at the

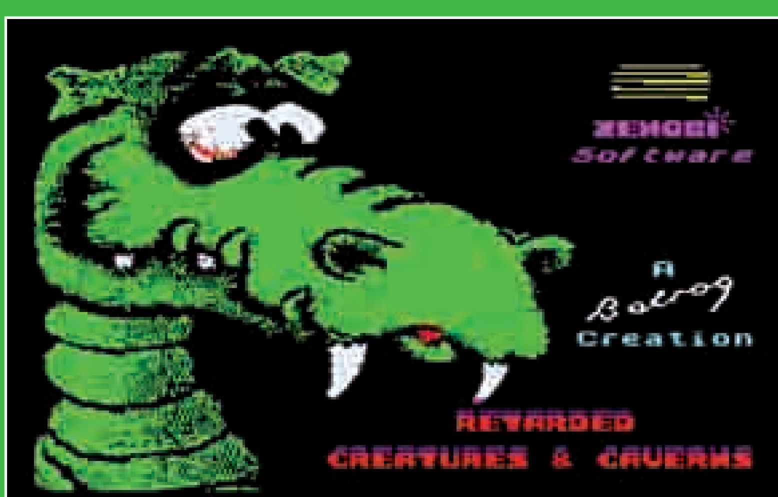
"I WAS LEFT TO DO WHATEVER I FELT WAS NECESSARY TO KEEP ZENOBI UP AND RUNNING, AND ANN STOOD BY ME FOR ALL OF IT. JUST WHAT MORE HELP COULD YOU ASK FOR?" JOHN WILSON



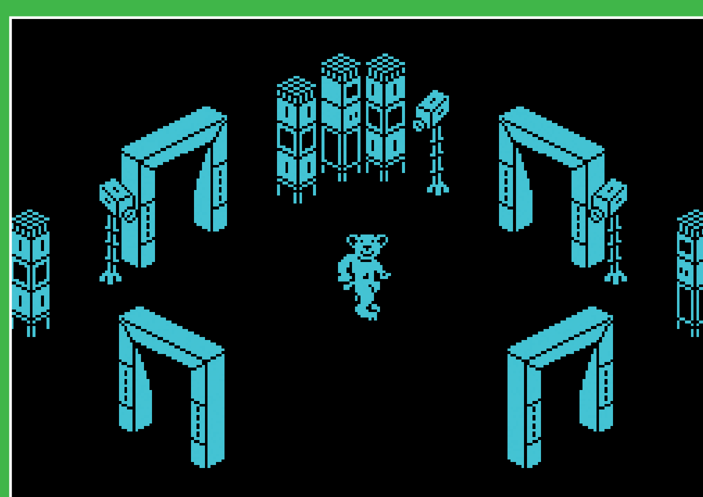
FINEST HOUR

The White Feather Cloak

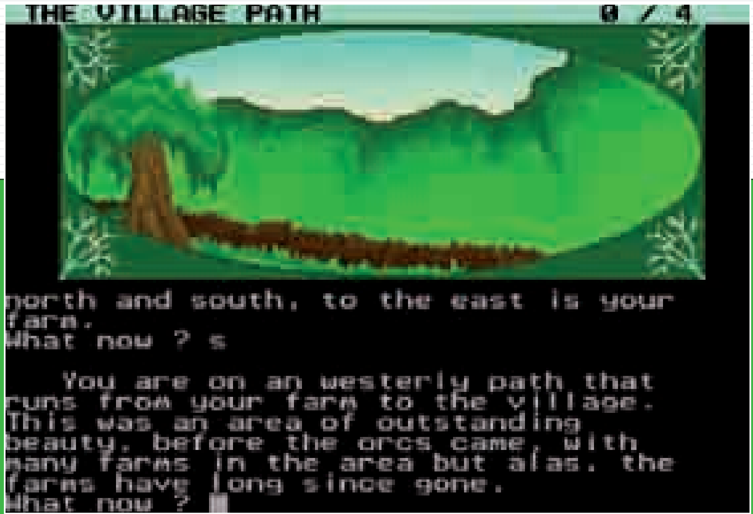
If you want a good introduction to a Zenobi game but are put off by the text-only premise of the majority of them, then try this. Not only is this two-parter an ambitious tale of kidnap, but it has some lovely graphics, the text is lush and the puzzles are clever and plentiful.



Retarded Creatures & Caverns was great value – since it had the game *A Legacy For Alaric* on the B side.

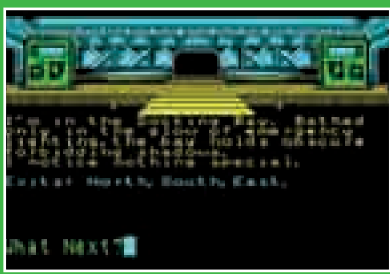


Not all of Zenobi's games were text adventures, as *Just One of Those Days* proves.





Soul Drinker by Dave Blower was one of Zenobi's Atari ST games, complete with graphics.



Being given locations helped when navigating around games.

start of each month. All the payments were agreed via a signed contract prior to the game being released and copies of this contract were kept by all parties concerned. The reason I did things this way was because I had always felt that the authors of this world had been abused in the past – a couple of personal experiences when I first started out highlighted this to me – so I tried to ensure that the authors received the best possible deal at all times."

John managed to build up a solid team to help him with the production of games. Artists such as Sean Doran, Shaun McClure and Kez Gray helped to produce some outstanding loading screens. And authors Jack Lockerby, Laurence Creighton, Diane Rice, Clive Wilson, Jon Scott, Steve Clay, and Jamie Murphy were among the Balrog's favourites.

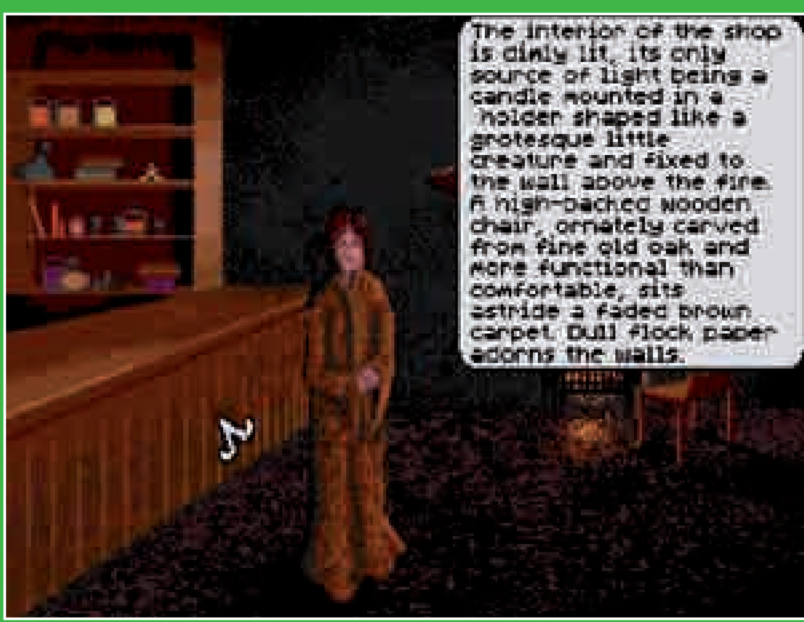
"We were a 'family' but like most families we all grow-up, move on and lose contact. However that does not mean that we forget – we don't!" John had a number of attributes he looked for in an adventure game. They had to be well-written, 100 per cent solvable was a must – "believe me there were a few major games that never allowed the player to complete them and that is inexcusable," he says – and they needed to have reasonable screen presentation. If that was topped off with an interesting and involving plot, it was a winner.

"Of the games which I published, I must say I was proud of each and every single one of them, otherwise I would never have released them to the general public," says John. "I would never release anything I was not happy with and would not ask anybody to hand over their cash for something if I would not have done so myself. One game that did cause my head to swell a touch was *Retarded Creatures And Caverns*, but only because it was awarded the coveted YS Megagame accolade."

Your Sinclair did John a number of favours. Writer Mike Gerrard had been sent a wonderful pearl of a game called *Snap* by Garry Cappucinni that had been written using the Professional Adventure Writing System. The author wanted to sell it himself but Mike sent the game back saying it was too good to self-publish, believing he would sell only a handful of tapes. Having advised Garry to contact a software house, the author went straight to Zenobi. The name of the game was changed to *Crack City*, it was sold as the first part of the *Snow Dogs Trilogy* and Mike gave it nine out of ten.

But although Zenobi was primarily a publisher of Spectrum games, John did make one departure – publishing games for the Atari ST.

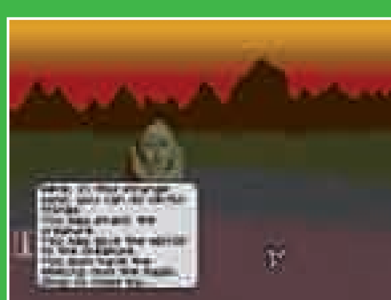
The Spectrum was close to John's heart, since it was a machine he had got to grips with, and he knew the market well. The relationships he had built up with authors, journalists and customers meant he became loyal to the Speccy but he knew he had to move his business on in some way and, since he had bought an Atari ST, it seemed the obvious choice. "I only entered the Atari market because it was the next machine I purchased," he reveals. "I never bought a C64 or an Amstrad CPC which I felt was too much like the Speccy and not a big enough step forward in terms of technology. I



Jason Taylor's *The Magic Shop* for the Atari ST was a top selling title for Zenobi.



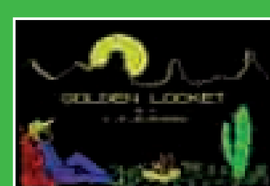
Despite what you might think, there's no Bagpuss for sale…



Maybe you can kill it by showing it an image of its face?

ONE OF THOSE DAYS

Not all of Zenobi's games were text-based. *Just One Of Those Days* was a proper arcade adventure and quite a good one too. It began with a note – "Make your way to Azurian 5 and locate and destroy the Megabrain that is controlling the complex." But it frustratingly gave the player just one life and it wasn't an easy game. This one chance to succeed had your adrenaline pumping as you made your way around the isometric viewed game. Assuming the role of a bear, you had to scoot through doors and avoid all manner of nasties. The game, which was released in 1988, was rather slow at times and, although, fun, Zenobi stuck to the text-adventures in the future.



AVOID LIKE THE PLAGUE

The Golden Locket

Frustratingly difficult right from the beginning, this Western adventure game is anything but golden. A bear threatens to kill you at almost every opportunity – and most often does. Added to that is a terrible parser. Without a doubt this is Zenobi's worst game. A rarity, but it did happen unfortunately.

COMPANY PROFILE

ZENOBI SOFTWARE


FROM BEYOND

First Place

In The Category Of

BEST COMMERCIAL ADVENTURE COMPANY

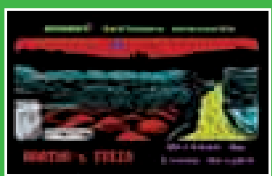
Is Awarded To

ZENOBI SOFTWARE

Run By

JOHN 'BALROG' WILSON

Zenobi Software picks up another award.



Linda Wright's *Agatha's Folly* was one of many adventures not written by the Balrog himself in the later years of Zenobi.

bought the ST and thought it was time to move on to that platform. I did the same thing when I bought an Amiga and a PC, although in their cases I was unable to write for them so I chose to follow the emulation route instead."

John doesn't feel restricting his business to the Spectrum and Atari ST caused any damage: "I just felt that the C64 and CPC markets were not for me. They were already covered by other software houses and I saw no need to elbow my way in. And as I said, I'd never bought one of those machines and without one I had no way of programming for them. I did a bit for the Sam Coupe but that was through Dave Whitmore. He converted various titles and published them on licence from Zenobi."

Eventually, with the Spectrum market declining in line with the other 8-bit machines, Zenobi's sales began to fall away. People were moving to the 16-bit machines and, despite a flurry of releases in the early 1990s, they were not selling in the same quantities as those of the Eighties.

From the heyday when Zenobi's sales for a single new game could reach four figures, it was becoming more likely they would sell just 20 or 30. John sent out more than that in review copies alone and it was obvious the writing was on the wall.

It was getting to a stage when the advance fee, which John handed out to authors, was not being recouped and John was failing to reach his target of selling at least 200 games per week in order to survive.

Zenobi's catalogue may have been increasing year-on-year but it was taking sales of 70 different games to reach the same level of income he had been able to attain with only a dozen.

On 1 October, 1997, Zenobi ceased trading. There would be no more new releases from this independent adventure software house. The accolades – Zenobi was voted Best Commercial Adventure Company in The From Beyond Adventure Awards 1992, Best Software House in the Adventurers Convention Awards 1994 and Best 8-bit Adventure Game for *The Taxman Cometh* in the 1992/93 Golden Chalice Awards among many others – would come to a halt.

In a way, it highlighted once and for all that the Spectrum market had come to an end. But there was some bitterness. John was fuming that his games were being widely distributed on the internet for free and without permission, a situation he believes hastened his decision not to publish any new games. It was a sad end to what was around a dozen glorious years of supporting the Spectrum. John had, after all, continued to pump out new games even when the major software houses had left for pastures new.

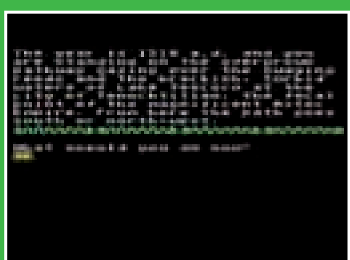
Yet it was impossible to keep such a good name down. Zenobi lives on to sell its old games. John set up a website (www.zenobi.co.uk) from which the Zenobi CD is available to buy, containing dozens upon dozens of classic adventure Spectrum games. A second CD with the Atari releases is also available.

But will we ever see a new release from the Balrog?

"Not unless I can go back in time and start all over again," he says. "The fingers are too arthritic for all the typing and the brain has long since lost its sharpness. Every single morning I wake up – but then I have my tea/toast and settle for what lies ahead."

A contented Balrog. You can't ask for much more than that.

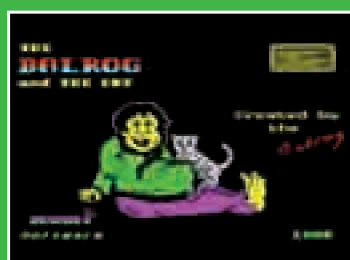
GAMES REVIEWS



AZTEC ASSAULT

1992 ZENOBI

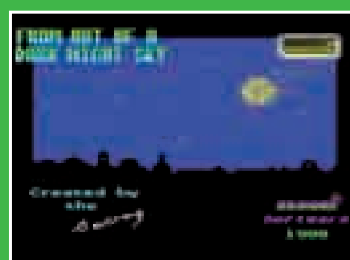
» Aimed at beginners, *Aztec Assault* was a nice introduction to adventure gaming for those who had yet to take the plunge, even at this late stage. The game threw you back to 1519AD where you battled against a number of baddies led by The Chameleon. It was stunningly accurate, representing the Aztec period and all of its laws and customs to perfection. Educational and fun. Not bad.
80%



THE BALROG AND THE CAT

1989 ZENOBI

» In an adventure packed with familiar Zenobi characters – Fuddo, Slam and Bulbo, this game saw John Wilson on top form. This game had humour with in-jokes aplenty (free help dished out with every purchase at the pub) and it was a fine use of the Quill Adventure System. John managed to overcome the Quill's limitations to great effect with this title and although easier than many of his games, it was no less an adventure for it. **80%**



FROM OUT OF A DARK NIGHT SKY

1989 ZENOBI

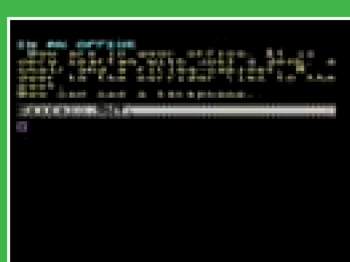
» Another Quill game from the Rochdale Balrog, this sci-fi story surrounds the life of Martin whose car comes to a halt in the dark with a bright red glow hovering above. But there were a few problems. The vocabulary was not as wide as you would have hoped. The writing itself, however, was atmospheric. Little quirks in the text lent a nice feel.
60%



FUDDO AND SLAM

1988 ZENOBI

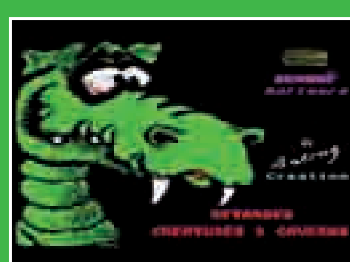
» Funny, packed with Spectrum references, this game showed just why John Wilson was an adventuring god. The game was surreal. Aliens, orcs, dragons, dwarves were all thrown into this particular mix. And while there were some frustrations at time – it was often difficult to find the right words – any pangs of anger were overridden by the sense of excitement. Okay, it was not one of John's best but it was certainly worth a go. **70%**



MURDER HE SAID

1993 ZENOBI

» Everyone loves a great murder mystery and this was one of the best. Here we see Philip Stowe lying dead and you have to get to the bottom of the case. As you scour Dundee Manor in the hunt for clues, you will find a large number of suspects. Do a spot of interviewing, examine the right things and you'll soon be on the right path. Jack Lockerby was one of Zenobi's best authors and with this game everything just fell into place. **80%**



RETARDED CREATURES & CAVERNS

1989 ZENOBI

» To succeed you have to examine everything, try every combination of movement and leave no object untouched. Interactivity is key to winning here. As with some other Zenobi games, this involving title has a few problems with a restrictive parser but it nevertheless has all of the hallmarks of a classic Wilson game: the humour above all.
90%

eMag

JURASSIC PARK

LIES! ALL BLOODY LIES!



- » **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **GENRE:** DINOSAUR-HUNTING-SIMULATOR
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5

HISTORY



Why would someone want to play *Jurassic Park* on the NES? Mainly because it's a fine game in its own right, and an example of a decent film-to-game conversion. You've got plenty of dinosaurs to shoot, keycards to find (thereby gaining access to buildings), bosses to defeat, stampeding triceratops to avoid, and all manner of exciting and fun set-pieces. Admittedly the SNES and MD versions were better, though in entirely different ways, but this was still good.

Except for me. For me it turned into a hellish struggle, which ended only in frustration and eventual hatred for the game, only mellowing years later. I had bought the game the same time as a friend, and we competed to finish it first. Now, this is a very difficult game, perhaps even borderline impossible without cheating. But my friend seemed to sail through it, regaling us at school with tales of the final level – specifically, that the game finished with an exciting jeep chase scene, while dinosaurs chased you down. I wasted many hours of many afternoons trying to reach this seemingly amazing final level, but always failed. It nearly became an obsession, trying to make it to the end to see this fabled stage, until eventually I had to put it away for good. Years later, thanks to the internet telling me about a level select cheat, I discovered there was no final jeep level. I'd been cheated! My whole life was a lie! And so on...

Although this diatribe has less to do with the NES version of *Jurassic Park* and more to do with one man's descent into madness as a result of his inability to let go of the past and deal with the truth, it still has a point. That point is, why the hell do people feel the need to lie about the games they play, and invent increasingly surreal stories of things which aren't real? If it's not someone claiming to have played a game down the arcades that doesn't exist, it's someone telling you that the final level of *Jurassic Park* on the NES features an exciting chase scene in a jeep. It was a lie. A vicious, nasty little lie that still manages to cut to this very day. If I ever meet my friend again I may just force him to endure what I had to go through...







The Definitive Contra

"I IDENTIFY VERY PERSONALLY WITH THIS GAME, BECAUSE LOTS OF PEOPLE CALL ME A CONTRA ALL THE TIME", SAYS STUART CAMPBELL, ON THE WAY TO THE DOCTOR'S TO GET HIS EARS SYRINGED.

The purpose of The Definitive is to lay a cool, soothing hand on the fevered brow of poor confused game series, and if you're looking for a videogame mixed-up kid you'd be hard-pushed to find a bigger basket case than *Contra*. Even the very first game in the series had three different names, three different sets of characters and two different settings, and it only got messier from there. The homeports had different names to their arcade parents, extra stages, different level layouts and (depending on which country they were released in) robots instead of *Rambo*-type mercenaries as the stars. Even releases within the same country, but on different formats, got different versions of the game with different names and protagonists. And lordy, don't even get us started on the storyline.

Even the gameplay in *Contra* is schizophrenic, taking place from three different perspectives (side-scrolling, vertical-scrolling, and into-the-screen 3D – and in later games, overhead view too), but despite all of this it kick-started and defined a gamestyle that would go on to include some of the most loved videogames ever. From the Spectrum's wonderful *Cobra* to the arcade's *Metal Slug* series to *Gunstar Heroes* on the Mega Drive and perhaps the genre's highpoint, the toweringly fantastic *Gunner's Heaven* on PSone, every running, jumping, shooting platformer owes a debt to *Contra*. Or *Gryzor*. Or *Probotector*. Or whatever the hell it is. Hey, look over there! The feature's starting!

1987
CONTRA AKA GRYZOR AKA PROBOTECTOR (ARCADE/NES)

The original coin-op starred two hunky dudes (modelled after Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone) going by the splendid names of Bill Rizer and Lance Bean (unless you're reading the manual of the US NES game, in which case they're Mad Dog and Scorpion), battling fearsome alien enemies on a remote island just off New Zealand in the year 2633 (or, in the American NES game, in South America in 1988). It was ported to the US NES under its original name of *Contra* (in the late Eighties the word carried political connotations which were less popular in Europe, hence the coin-op's alternative title and the US game's changed setting), but had substantial changes to the arcade original. Levels have different layouts (eg the first stage has two exploding bridges instead of one), and on the NES the arcade's long final level is broken up into multiple and expanded individual stages. The US and Japanese versions were created by different teams using different "mappers" of the NES hardware, and are therefore substantially different. The Japanese port – which took the European arcade title of *Gryzor* – has map screens, extra cutscenes and animations (check out the swaying palm trees on level 1, for example) not seen in the US game. European NES owners had to wait until 1990 for their release, which was of course the inferior US version, but concerns over Germany's stringent laws about violence against human characters in videogames saw the macho characters and some of the enemies replaced with robots and the game's title changed again, this time to *Probotector*. The *Probotector* name would stay with European incarnations of the series right up to the PS2 era, when it became *Contra* everywhere.

PLAY IT NOW ON: There was a recent PS2 budget port of the original *Gryzor* in Japan (oddly using the *Contra* title), or you could try the (slightly) graphically-enhanced Xbox Live Arcade port for the 360, though it's fairly horrible with the 360's rubbish D-pad. Failing that, obviously it's MAME time.



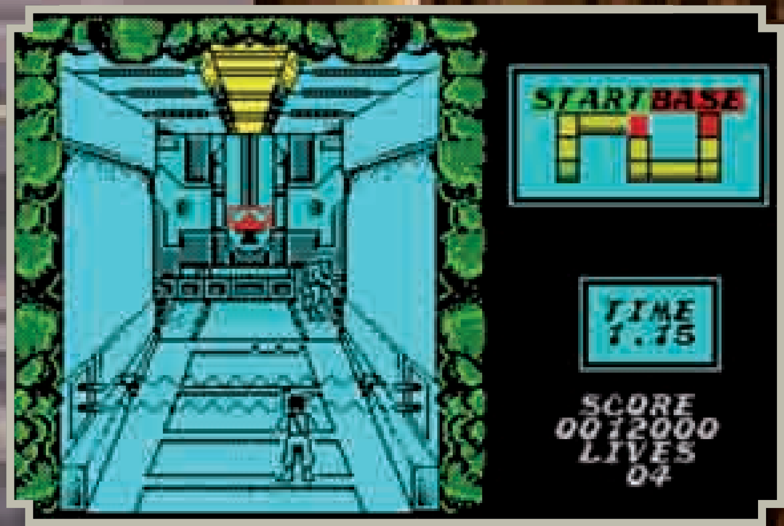


» Full-on two-man action, of the sort this feature's going to almost completely ignore.

1987/8
GRYZOR (SPECTRUM, C64, CPC)

The home-computer versions of *Gryzor* by Ocean are worth a communal separate entry, because they bear little practical resemblance to either the arcade original or each other, all three having different level layouts as well as fundamental gameplay changes. On the Amstrad the display flicks half a screen at a time instead of scrolling and it's almost impossible to duck without jumping down a level (you have to hold down fire first, which freezes your position and will generally get you killed). On the much cruder-looking C64 version you can race to the end of the first level in 13 seconds flat, but you can't assign "jump" to the joystick or any other controls to the keyboard, so you have to put the computer on the floor and jump with your foot. On the Speccy you can't move backwards, you can't shoot downwards while jumping (something common to all three 8-bit ports), and you can neither jump nor duck while in the water (the coin-op only stopped you jumping), making it a lethal death-trap (another feature shared with the CBM and CPC). On the other hand, unlike the other two versions, the Speccy's level 1 bridge doesn't explode and the fortress at the end of the first stage doesn't fire at you at all, which balances things out a bit. Despite such concessions, all three versions are insanely difficult, and with no continues allowed you'll need to be superhuman to even get to the end of level 2 in any of them.

PLAY IT NOW ON: EmuZWin is the best free Spectrum emulator, WinVICE does a great job of all the Commodore micros, and CaPriCe (look, don't blame me for the punctuation here, okay?) is a splendid and easy-to-use Amstrad emu.



» The Speccy version does at least look rather spiffy.



» The sequel has overhead stages, but no 3D or vertically-scrolling ones.

1988
SUPER CONTRA AKA PROBOTECTOR 2 (ARCADE, NES)

Curiously, *Contra* only ever got one arcade sequel (unless you count the port of the SNES game to the SNES-on-a-PCB Nintendo Super System, which is frankly cheating). *Super Contra* saw the first appearance in the series of overhead levels and the smart bomb (here called "shells"). Unusually you start with none of these all-obliterating superweapons, and they can only be found/used in the overhead stages. As with the first game, the NES port (known as *Probotector 2 – Return Of The Evil Forces* in PAL territories) takes place in the same graphical settings as the coin-op, but with mostly different actual level layouts, and there's no smart bomb in the NES game.

PLAY IT NOW ON: *Super Contra* has never featured on a modern-day retro release (though it's supposedly coming to XBLA), and the limited NES continues are a pain, so stick with the arcade version on MAME for now.



» This is "Homicide Censor No.2", the splendidly named second "boss" installation.

1989
GRYZOR AKA CONTRA (MSX2)

The "port" of the original coin-op to the MSX2 (and the last release to carry the "*Gryzor*" name) was to all intents and purposes an entirely different game, and radically dissimilar to the other 8-bit micro conversions too. While the settings were basically the same, the levels were completely new, and were presented in flick-screen form rather than scrolling, effectively making the game a series of separate single-screen "levels" within each stage. (It also made the vertical stages much easier, since you could no longer die by falling off the bottom of the screen). The difficulty was further reduced with the inclusion of a sizeable energy bar, which could survive several hits and was replenished after each stage, and by the fact that there were almost never more than two enemy soldiers on screen at once. There were new power-ups (eg a useful rear-firing shot), and on collecting one the game paused and let you select which of the weapons from your armoury you wanted to use. And just to complete the befuddlement of the poor *Contra* fan, you could now jump in the water but NOT duck.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The excellent MSX emu BlueMSX.



» The third stage includes a nasty waterfall/mountain-climbing bit, in a little tribute to the original coin-op.

1991
CONTRA AKA PROBOTECTOR AKA OPERATION C (GAME BOY)

Loosely based on *Super Contra* (the level settings are again the same, but the layouts are even more radically different to the NES version – the helicopter gunship boss of the first stage, for example, is replaced with a giant submarine), GB *Contra* was one of the handheld's most popular early releases, and for good reason. Giving the player the auto-firing machine gun from the off, and introducing new weapon upgrades like the homing shot, *Operation C* is a rip-roaring fire fight from start to finish, and while it's by no means easy it's rather less unfairly hard than its arcade dad and NES big brother. The original Japanese release also lets you tackle the first four levels (of five) in any order you like – a common feature in Japanese Konami GB games at the time – whereas the European one (confusingly titled "*Probotector*" although it's most closely related to *Probotector 2*) and the US version ("*Operation C*") don't.

And just in case the naming continuity wasn't already enough of a mess, in 1999 Konami released a European compilation of GB games for the GB Color, entitled "*Konami GB Collection Vol. 1*", which included a colourised version of *Probotector*, except with the level select from the Japanese release, and – despite the name – the normal Euro-version robots replaced by the human characters of the "*Contra*" iteration. Sigh.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance is the GB emulator of champions.

1992
CONTRA FORCE (NES)

Next, just to really throw a spanner into the works, Konami released an NES follow-up that had no apparent connection to any of the other games in the series, featured none of the same characters or settings, and played completely differently. A fairly standard NES side-scrolling platform shooter, *Contra Force* gives you control of four different characters who can occasionally be swapped between, and is pretty good fun. It's got absolutely nothing to do with *Contra*, though, (it was originally meant to be an unrelated game under the name of "Arc Hound") unless you count one of the characters being called "Beans", so in the interests of saving space we'll move swiftly on.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The best NES emu remains the superb VirtuaNES.



» There isn't much going on in this shot, but how often do you get to use a picture of a fork-lift truck in a game, eh?



» In real life, this would be very hard to do.

1992
CONTRA SPIRITS AKA CONTRA 3 – THE ALIEN WARS AKA SUPER PROBOTECTOR – ALIEN REBELS (SNES)

Even though the series was only five-years-old at the time, 1992 was when *Contra* truly came of age. The SNES game was one of the console's most lauded titles from the day of release, and time hasn't withered its appeal any. It's a phenomenal game, stuffed with spectacular set pieces but relentlessly ferocious in between too, with barely a second for the player to catch breath. Everyone's got their favourite moment – whether it be the terrifying skeleton robot ripping the walls apart to get at you, the tremendous rotating overhead-view levels or the motorbike chase culminating in a helicopter ride where you end up leaping between missiles in flight to attack the enemy airship – but there isn't a single weak spot all the way to the end. (And if you're not playing it on Hard you haven't seen the real end yet, incidentally.) Simply one of the best games of all time.

PLAY IT NOW ON:
The Definitive's SNES emu of choice is the mighty ZSNES.



» Heeeeeeree's Robot Johnny!

1994
CONTRA – THE ALIEN WARS AKA CONTRA SPIRITS AKA PROBOTECTOR 2 (GAME BOY)

Inexplicably shedding the "3" from its name for the GB release, and with the Euro version adopting the name of the completely different earlier NES game (hngh), this was nevertheless a very impressive cut-down version of the SNES title. Most of the signature scenes make it across, including the overhead-view levels, and it's every bit as tough as its grown-up counterparts (though there's also an Easy mode that lets you practice on softened-up versions of the first three stages). A magnificent achievement on the primitive hardware, a challenge in its own right, and would it really have been so hard to call it "Probotector 3", you morons?

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.



» Sadly, this shot doesn't feature my favourite *Hard Corps* character, the fantastic man/wolf hybrid Brad Fang. I wish I was called Brad Fang.

1994

CONTRA HARD CORPS AKA PROBOTECTOR (MEGA DRIVE)

Oh, for God's sake, Konami. "*Probotector*"? You're just taking the piss now, aren't you? You couldn't even be bothered to call it "Mega Probotector" or something? Tchah. Anyway, *Contra Hard Corps* – or Contra Really Very Hard Indeed Corps, as it should more accurately be titled, is a tour de force, right up there with the SNES game in the *Contra* pantheon. A riot of action and invention and humour and explosions from the off, *Hard Corps* looks like the result of an illicit liaison between *Contra 3* and ex-Konami coders Treasure's 1993 *Gunstar Heroes*. Indeed, *Hard Corps* has Treasure hallmarks stamped all over it, from the running bosses to the morphing enemies made of cubes, the 3D stages where the action moves towards the player and "out" of the screen rather than the more traditional way, and the bizarre fighting spin-off sections. Maybe Treasure left blueprints lying around when they left. (Or maybe on the way out they stole some. If you've played *Gunstar Super Heroes* on the GBA, you'll recognise the flying stage in *Hard Corps*, for example.)

The variety of levels is breathtaking, and with multiple characters, branching routes and different endings the replay value is immense. You'll have to sweat blood to see even one of the credits sequences, however, and if you want to have the remotest chance of making your way through all that *Hard Corps* has to offer, make sure to get the Japanese version. It gives you three hits per life (instead of one in the US and PAL releases), and the energy bar is also restored after a level, so overall it's only about 30% as hard as the other versions. (It also has cheat codes, which were disabled in the Western releases.)

PLAY IT NOW ON:
The multi-Sega emu Fusion.

1996

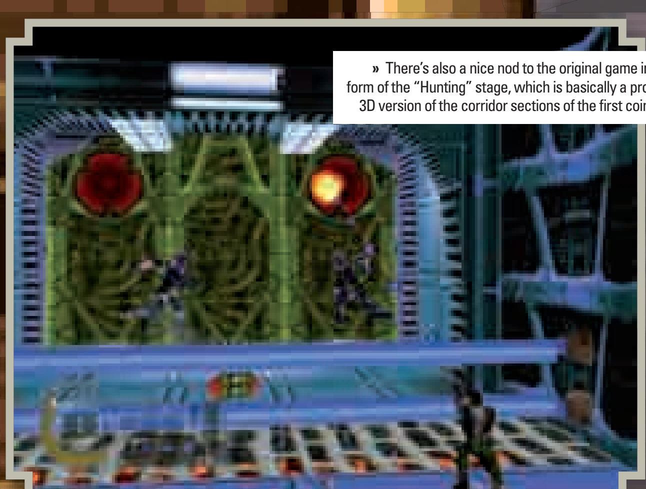
CONTRA: LEGACY OF WAR (PSONE)

Konami's first 32-bit *Contra* marked the series' most radical departure since *Contra Force*. Developer Appaloosa Interactive delivered something most closely resembling a polygonal version of the overhead-view stages from the SNES game, which can be rendered even more three-dimensional with the gimmicky 3D-glasses mode. The viewpoint makes accurate aiming difficult, the four selectable characters differ only in their power-up weapons, and since power-up weapons last for roughly three seconds it's not much of an addition. It all moves at breakneck pace, though, and as with most *Contras* it's ferociously difficult, so there's at least plenty of challenge. And the 3D is occasionally used well, as the soldiers run up ramps and across bridges and seek cover behind pillars and the like. But in most respects *LOW* was a bad misjudgement of what people liked about the series, and history hasn't remembered it fondly.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Thanks to remarkable recent breakthroughs in the world of firmware hacking, your reporter actually played his copy of *Legacy Of War* on his PSP. But it should work just as well on a PS2 if you snag a cheap copy from a bargain bin somewhere.



» Most of *Legacy* is pretty brown and murky.



» There's also a nice nod to the original game in the form of the "Hunting" stage, which is basically a proper-3D version of the corridor sections of the first coin-op.

1998

THE CONTRA ADVENTURE (PSONE)

Legacy Of War was less than popular, so the next outing (also coded by Appaloosa) was something of a back-to-basics mission. A third of the levels are (despite being presented in Klonoa-style pseudo-3D) classic-style side-scrolling *Contra*, with the other two-thirds split between the polygonal overhead view of *LOW* and third-person *Tomb Raider*-type 3D. (Parts of the game take place in a very *Tomb Raider*ish setting, too.) Several of the earlier game's more annoying flaws are fixed (upgraded weapons once more stay with you until you die, and as with *Contra 3* you only lose the one you were actually using at the time), and the difficulty is less punishing, although being sent back to the start of a long level when you "continue" can be hard to take. There's plenty of invention too, like the level set in a falling lift with zero gravity. And while it still wasn't a big hit with *Contra* fans, it's miles better than its predecessor.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Again, *Contra Adventure* – and most other PSone games – can be played via emulation on a PSP, or by running the original discs on your PSone or PS2.

2002
CONTRA HARD SPIRITS AKA CONTRA ADVANCE: THE ALIEN WARS EX (GBA)

In the early days the GBA was bombarded with quick shovelware ports of SNES games, and this was one of the more controversial. It's basically the SNES game, but hacked up rather crudely (there are no smart bombs and you can no longer carry two weapons at once, considerably reducing the game's strategic depth), with the overhead-view levels removed and replaced by two new stages. It's a swings-and-roundabouts kind of deal, and the loss of firepower sophistication is a heavy blow, but this is still a brilliant game, and the new levels more than live up to the standard of the others. Much more annoying is the cheapskate absence of a battery save, meaning you'll have to carry a pen and notepad around to write down stupid long passwords if you don't want to play through the whole thing in one go.

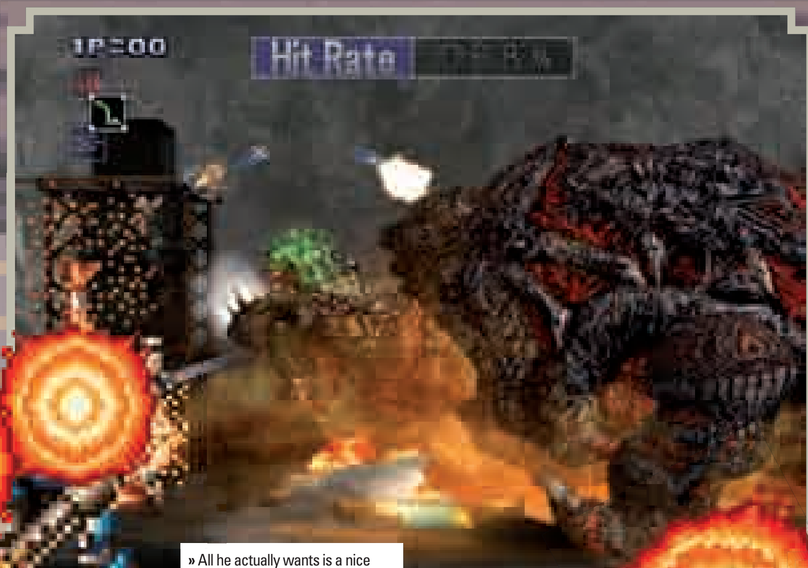


» This new level is inspired by a very similar one from *Contra Hard Corps*. The other is reminiscent of a stage from *Super Contra*.

2002
CONTRA: SHATTERED SOLDIER (PS2)

For the new generation of hardware, Konami finally took the hint and gave the fans what they wanted. Handing control back to, Nobuya Nakazato, the director of *Contra 3* and *Hard Corps*, produced a game taken straight from the original *Contra* blueprint – five brutally hard stages of run-'n'-gun platform action. (In fact, most victims peg *Shattered Soldier* as even tougher than *Hard Corps*, which is saying something and a half.) Pseudo-3D graphics with a dark, gritty palette gave it an intense atmosphere, and lots of references to previous games (particularly *Contra 3*, whose giant-turtle boss and hanging-off-a-missile sections made reappearances) made sure the player felt at home.

PLAY IT NOW ON: A day when you're really in the zone.



» All he actually wants is a nice tickle under the chin, but no, YOU had to wade in with the rocket-propelled grenades.



» Man, that must be really difficult to aim.

2004
NEO CONTRA (PS2)

The *Contra* series ends (for now, at least) on a pretty weird note. *Neo Contra* (with Nakazato at the helm again) verges on satire much of the time, with a ludicrous plot set nearly 2000 years after the first game, in which Bill Rizer is still fighting the good fight, this time against a band of evil mercenaries who have hijacked the good name of the Contra unit in order to wreak mayhem on a post-apocalyptic Earth where "No one sane or logical can expect to survive for even three days", etc etc. The storyline is snooker loopy, but the gameplay's pretty much in the style of *Legacy Of War*, except with the controls and viewpoint improved and the difficulty turned way down. There are some bizarre Konami cameos (Konameos?), such as a set of weapons from *Gradius V* showing up later on, and generally this is as close as the *Contra* series comes to a *Parodius*. Evidently Konami was a bit tired and emotional after 17 years of non-stop slaughter, and so am I, so I'm off for a lie down in a ditch. See you next time!

PLAY IT NOW ON: Drugs. (NB RETRO GAMER DOES NOT ENDORSE DRUG ABUSE.)

BOSS/RUSH

WHEN WE SQUARE UP TO THAT END-OF-LEVEL BADDIE FROM YESTERYEAR…

EVERYTHING IN THE MAGICAL QUEST STARRING MICKEY MOUSE

GAME INFO

- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE



Once upon a time, in a magical land far, far away, in a land filled with strange creatures and talking mice, there was a great collaboration of wizards and mages, and they called themselves Capcom. This group, this Capcom, were renowned across the kingdom for their amazing feats of visual trickery, and the magnificent works, which they created to amuse both children and adults. In the imperial year one-thousand nine-hundred and ninety-two, Capcom's magicians worked their magic, and crafted in a puff of smoke, a great Magical Quest, starring a mouse called Mickey, and some kind of dog-like thing called Pete. But there were to be great surprises in store, for this Pete was able to transmogrify himself into a variety of increasingly perilous foes. Worse still, to slow and deter our intrepid mouse hero, Pete barked orders to his minions to engage the rodent in combat… This is the legend, which resulted, having been told through the ages.

Mickey Mouse jumped and ran among the clouds, climbing a beanstalk ever higher, until he reached a plateau with forest. Traversing this wood, avoiding water and enemy alike, he reached a small bat-like creature which flew a bit, then fired little munchkins. Mickey wanted to put these munchkins in a pie and then wear it as pants, but instead he defeated the mini-boss.

A little way on and Mickey reached the real boss, and it was Pete! Oh hark! The dastardly scoundrel has fallen from a tree in the shape of a giant slug, with armour plating. In a moment of bravery Mickey grabs some blocks and breaks them in Pete's face, at which point a piece of his body falls off. Mickey wanted to put this in a pie, but instead he threw it at Pete again, killing him, in an ironic fashion with himself. A spirit resembling Pete appears and floats away.

Adventuring onwards across the blighted land Mickey finds himself in an evil swamp, with malevolent beans bouncing from branches. Eventually he reaches the lair of the dreaded evil king bean himself – who would become naked, throwing what meagre clothes he had as a weapon. Despite being repulsed by such flagrant nudity, Mickey wanted to put him in a pie, but instead turned into a magician and fired ice cream until the bean was dead.

Deeper into this nightmare Mickey then encounters Pete, who's now a spider, and shooting webs at Mickey. But our brave mouse evades these shots from the cad's abdomen, and continues to fire magical ice cream. Soon the spider is dead, with another spirit rising.

Venturing underground, the hero finds himself within a fiery hell, presided over by two adversaries who are burning to get their hands on him. Avoiding the hammer blasts of the first, Mickey reaches the second, except now he's a fireman! With the head honcho being a burning face, Mickey wanted to put him in a pie, but instead whips out

THEY THEN ALL LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER, DANCING, FOREVER DANCING. ALWAYS. UNABLE TO EVER STOP DANCING, AS IF POSSESSED BY A DANCING PIE.



» This first sub-boss is surprisingly easy, with only a limited attack pattern. Kick his ass, then gloat about it.



» The first proper boss, and it appears that Pete has somehow turned into a giant armoured slug which falls out of a tree.

his hose and fires water into the thug's eyes. He dies, screaming.

Next Mickey braves the skies to tangle with a flying buzzard. The eggs this brute attempts to throw don't faze our hero, who wants to put them in a pie, but instead uses mountaineering gear to hang on to hooks which float in the air. The turkey soon has his goose cooked... IN A PIE!!!

Afterwards it's a quick nip down to the arctic, to frolic blithely in the ice. Here Pete makes another appearance, as a big chubby walrus who likes ice-skating and doing back flips. Mickey wants to steal his skates and put them in a pastry, but instead waits for the right moment and then beats the blubber out of Pete the Walrus.

Suddenly the games were over, and Mickey reached the summit of the vile fortress, which he needed to scale to defeat the ultimate evil! Deftly manoeuvring through the trap-laden puzzle corridors, the mouse called upon his two favourite things to give him strength: Jamiroquai playing on an iPod, and Wriggly's spearmint gum. Suddenly he was in the zone, tripping out and trying to squeeze the final Pete of the game, Viking Pete, into a pie! Before starting the epic battle though, Pete absorbs the Pete spirits released by the other boss Pete's already defeated. But he still defeats the final enemy, and then our hero wakes up in bed with his dog. It was all just a dream! Crikey, that's almost as bad as what happened in *Dallas* with Bobby coming back to life...

They then all lived happily ever after, dancing, forever dancing. Always. Unable to ever stop dancing, as if possessed by a dancing pie. The end.



» Wearing his climber's gear, Mickey takes on Pete as he slides about, Mode 7 style, on a semi-circle of ice.



» Once, when in Spain, a giant bird such as this came to me in a dream and told me, the cantaloupe is unable to dance.



» Pete has turned into a giant Viking! And what is Mickey doing to remedy this? Why, shooting ice cream from his head of course!



» All 108 innuendo-laden captions for this screenshot were deemed inappropriate by Retro Gamer's lawyers.



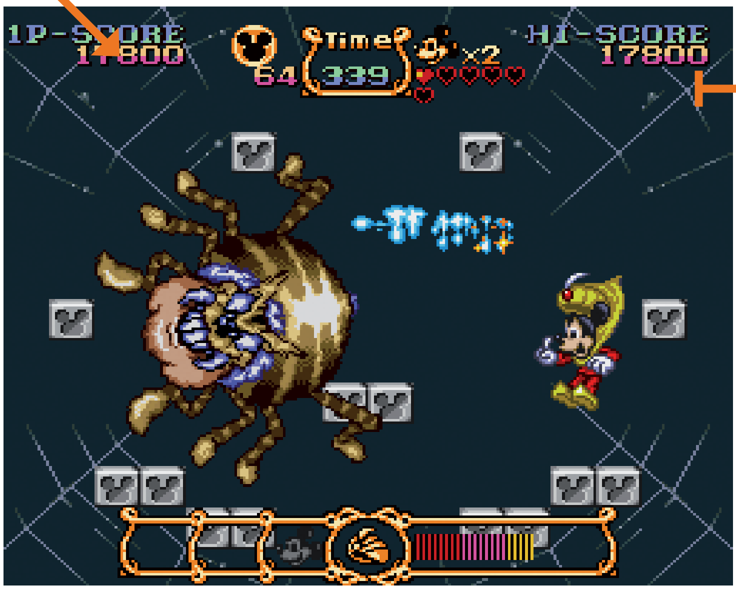
» And right at the end? You wake up in bed with Pluto, feeling hungover and used, realising it was all just a bad dream.



» Spikes, lava, and a diminutive fire imp with a big hammer. He hits the ground, sending lava and debris sky high.



» This mean little bean is just that, a mean little bean. As in a baked bean, except without the sauce.

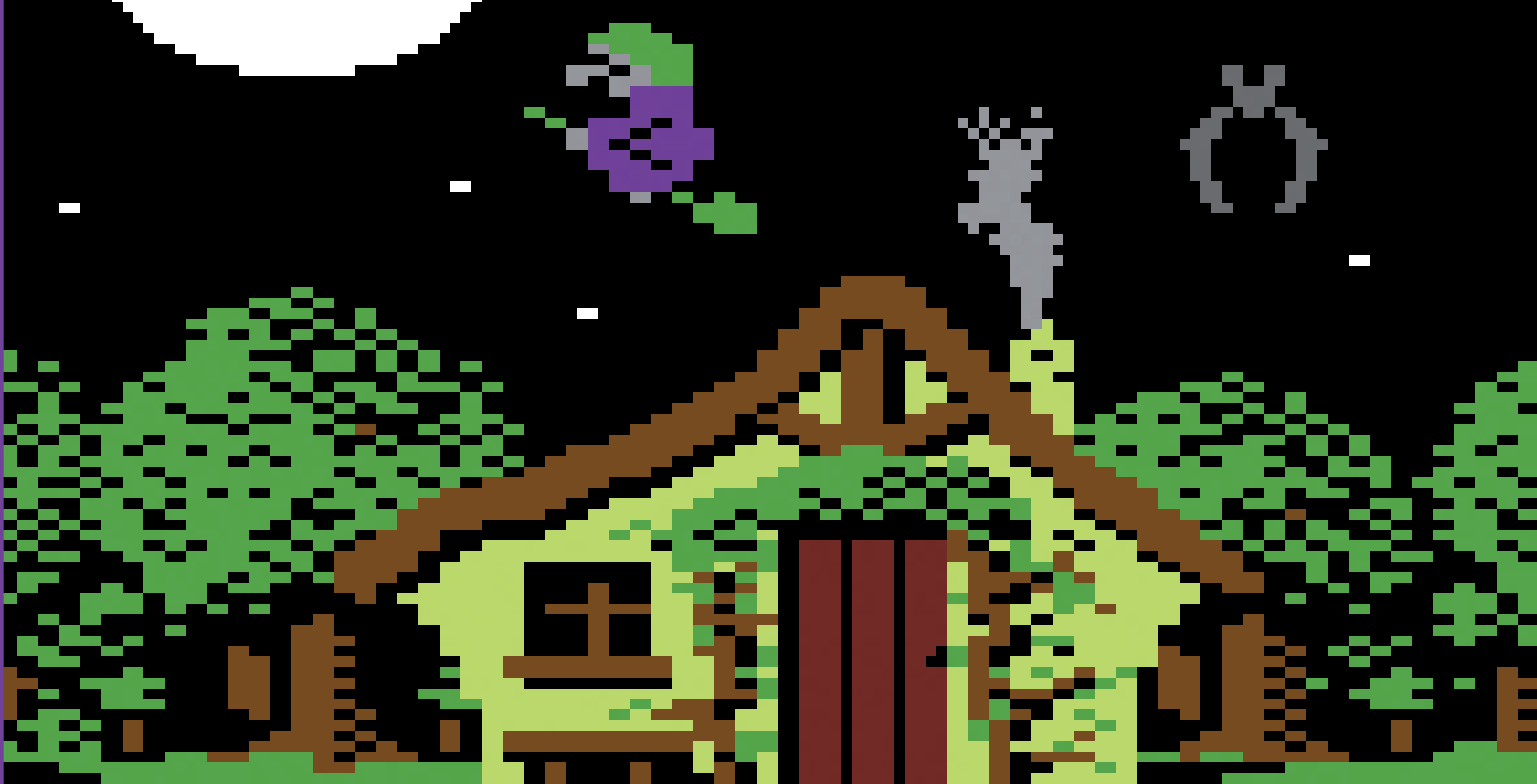


» Pete has turned into a massive Mode 7 spider. If you ask use though, his faces looks like a Cheshire cat.

THE MAKING OF...

CAULDRON AND CAULDRON II

Cauldron and its sequel wowed
Making Palace Software proud
Craig Grannell now talks to three
Men who fashioned, fervently
Bouncing pumpkins, spooks galore
Crowing witches, and much more
So read ye now, some history
And unlock Cauldron's mystery





» In this house, upon Hallowe'en, lives the witch who'd be Witch Queen!



» Above the graveyard, ghouls attack – fly hard, hag, and watch your back!

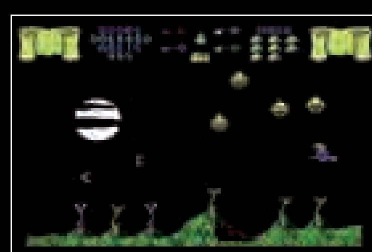
"ANOTHER PROBLEM WAS THAT WE PLAYED THE GAME WITH INFINITE LIVES WHEN TESTING, AND WHEN THE LIMITS WERE PUT IN, THE GAME WAS FAR TOO HARD" RICHARD LEINFELLNER

8-bit gamers fondly remember Palace's pair of spooky games. Despite both *Cauldron* and *Cauldron II* being really tough, Palace's skill for designing playable games shone through, resulting in a pair of releases that players stuck with, despite getting regularly splattered by on-screen nasties. "*Cauldron* actually came about because Palace had the rights to the *Halloween* movie," recalls Steve Brown, ex-Palace designer and the man responsible for the look and feel of both games. "The plan was to create a game based on the film, but this seemed a silly concept to me, and nothing I tried really worked." However, the concept of *Halloween* itself, rather than the film, got Brown thinking about pumpkins and witches, and the idea for *Cauldron* just popped into his head during a train journey. "I did some drawings, pitched the idea to [Palace co-founder] Pete Stone, and he unexpectedly said yes."

The game centres around a witch striving to become Witch Queen. She must locate six ingredients, return them to her cottage, do the whole 'hubble, bubble' thing and then defeat the 'Pumpking'. To complicate matters, the ingredients are found in the underworld, and so the witch must first locate keys to open doors while avoiding attacks from life-forms like kamikaze seagulls, hostile flying pumpkins, and other horrors. Unlike most titles of the time, *Cauldron* isn't restricted to one genre – the above-ground sections resemble *Defender* (the witch flying on a broomstick with heavy inertia, landing only to grab objects), while the underground portions are tough platform fare (like *Jet Set Willy* – that is if Matthew Smith's classic was located in underground caverns, populated with flying chunks of magma, and animated skeletons). This mix of genres arrived organically due to each creator's interest in particular games. "I totally loved *Defender* and *Scramble*, whereas Steve was a platform gamer," explains Richard Leinfellner, *Cauldron*'s lead programmer. "One day, we had the witch flying nicely, and Steve asked why there were two distinct game types – sideway-scrollers like *Scramble*, and platformers like *Manic Miner*. I said there was no technical reason why they couldn't be combined, and so we modified the game engine to do both."



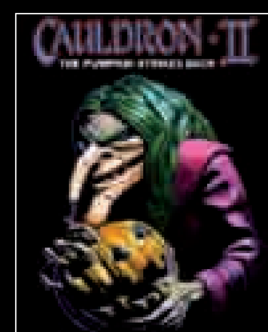
» Avoiding peril underground, our hag resolves to leap and bound.



» Hostile pumpkins aim to kill, but the hag has too much skill!

WITCHCRAFTED

In the modern era of Photoshop and affordable 3D modelling packages, much cover artwork for games is fashioned in CGI. Back in the Eighties, however, various other methods had to be employed, in order to figure out where shadows would fall from an object. Some artists just winged it, but Steve Brown was at the other end of the scale. "For *Cauldron*, I made a Plasticine witch model that was used as reference for the cover paintings," he explains. Just as at the end of *Cauldron II*, time hasn't entirely been kind to the hag, though. "The model's now buried up in the attic in a box somewhere, and the nose fell off in 1998," says Brown. That said, the witch apparently survived longer than some of the computers at Palace back in the day. "Spectrums didn't fare very well at Palace – Richard once threw one out of a second-floor window, and I left one on a train," recalls Brown. If only the rubber-keyed wonder bounced as well as a Palace pumpkin.





THE MAKING OF… CAULDRON AND CAULDRON II

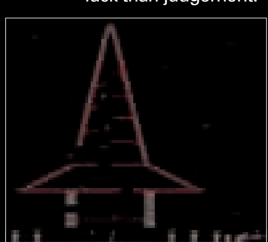


» Magma spews into the sky. Hag, take care, if you must fly.

MYSTICAL MARKETING

In-game marketing has become increasingly common over the years, from the occasional advertising hoarding in football games, to the rather brazen locations in the likes of *Crazy Taxi*. Palace's effort, way back in the mid-Eighties, was a rather more subtle affair. "The design of *Cauldron II*'s map was based around the Palace logo, which was a castle," explains Stan Schembri. "This meant that not only did the game have a tangible form, but also that in those early, naive days of advertising, we were able to have an element of product placement when the map was published."

Stan recalls that Steve Brown once spent many hours photographing each screen and then pasting the results together, in order to create a full map of *Cauldron II* for games magazines of the time. "I've also heard comments about the turrets of the castle resembling the witch's hat," notes Stan when we ask about another holistic element within the production, although he claims "this was a little more down to luck than judgement."



Leinfellner notes that once this was done, *Cauldron* was truly born. "I always like to create something original – people appreciate that," adds Brown. "And so combining the flying and platforming sections seemed like a great idea."

From that spark, Leinfellner recalls that the game came together quickly, but there was clearly great attention to detail when it came to storyline and visuals. "Every game needs good visual design and an interesting concept – it's the hook that you hang the gameplay on, and what draws players into the game," explains Brown. "I planned the look of the game right from the start – the witch was the classic vision of witches that I had in my head, probably from childhood memories of Disney's *Snow White*." Elsewhere, detailed characters arrived from the depths of Brown's imagination, resulting in a visually distinct and appealing game.

If any criticism can be levelled at *Cauldron*, it's that the gameplay can be unforgiving. Landing the witch without getting pummelled by enemies is hard enough, but the pixel-perfect jumping required was surely responsible for numerous smashed joysticks. "Our bad," says Brown. "We should have tested the game the whole way through, rather than just individual parts." Leinfellner adds: "Another problem was that we played the game with infinite lives when testing, and when the limits were put in the game was far too hard."

Many persevered, and the game 'Sizzled' in *Zzap*! ("Excellent combination of zapping, leaping and exploring."), and 'Smashed' in *Crash* ("A large, engaging and difficult game for the arcade player."), despite the Spectrum conversion's above-ground section lacking the scrolling of the Commodore release, replacing it with an awkward flick-screen approximation.

"I LIKE TO CREATE SOMETHING ORIGINAL - PEOPLE APPRECIATE THAT AND SO COMBINING THE FLYING AND PLATFORMING SEEMED LIKE A GREAT IDEA" STEVE BROWN

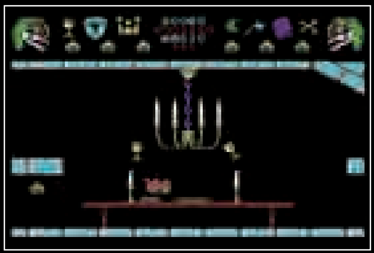
THE PUMPKIN STRIKES BACK

A year on, it was time to work on a follow-up, and again it began in the fertile mind of Steve Brown. However, the game Palace created bore little resemblance to its predecessor, aside from a few graphical touches, and superficially to *Cauldron*'s platform sections. In the sequel, the player takes on the role of a pumpkin warrior – the last survivor from the night the Witch Queen took power. His quest is to enter her huge palace, grab a lock of her hair, and find a cauldron with which to exact revenge, switching things back to the way they were. Various other useful items are scattered around the palace, providing protection from various adversaries.

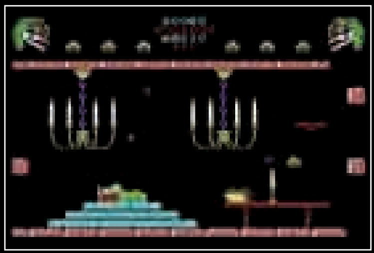
The control method was unique for the time: the pumpkin bounces around the palace, rebounding off walls, making the game an original spin on the genre – something important to Palace. "The idea behind *Cauldron II* was that there should be a sufficient thread to link it to the previous game, but that it should also present new ideas around the platform genre," recalls ex-Palace coder Stan Schembri. "A player would then be sufficiently assured that we'd done our best to create a new game, rather than fobbing them off with more of a successful formula." Brown agrees: "We wanted to make different stuff – plenty of people out there are happy to rehash ideas, but that's a poor waste of a life."

Fittingly, then, it was an item from the final screens of *Cauldron* that inspired the sequel. "I thought the bouncing pumpkin looked cool, and from there, the concept for *Cauldron II* came pretty easily, although some of the guys were dubious about the bouncing." With most games at the time enabling players to exert direct force on the character they were controlling, Palace's direction for *Cauldron II* was a departure, as Schembri explains: "The initial premise was that the pumpkin could only change

"THE IDEA BEHIND CAULDRON II WAS THAT THERE SHOULD BE A SUFFICIENT THREAD TO LINK IT TO THE PREVIOUS GAME, BUT THAT IT SHOULD ALSO PRESENT NEW IDEAS AROUND THE PLATFORM GENRE" STAN SCHEMBRI



» This banquet's not a tasty treat – from flying food, you must retreat.



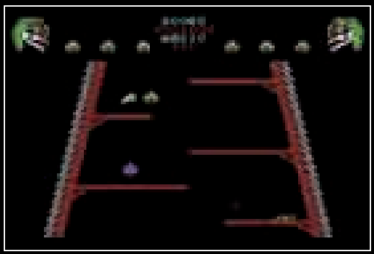
» The sleeping witch, guarded by magic (that kills pumpkins – oh, so tragic).

direction if force was applied to it and it was on a surface that had friction – this meant no changing direction in mid-air." However, it became apparent that this simple concept wasn't easy to realise. "I remember that the bouncing was a nightmare with the collision detection," recalls Leinfellner. "It was far more problematic than first envisaged," adds Schembri. "Once the pumpkin started flying about, it was unpredictable, and if there's one thing that's bound to cause horrific bugs it's unpredictability. Problems such as the pumpkin getting stuck between two surfaces gave me significant headaches." The introduction of a firing mechanism (enabling the pumpkin to attack adversaries) further complicated matters. "It was then possible to exert a force and thus change the pumpkin's direction, when the original intention was just to fire in that direction," says Schembri. "I don't think we ever fully solved that one," he admits.

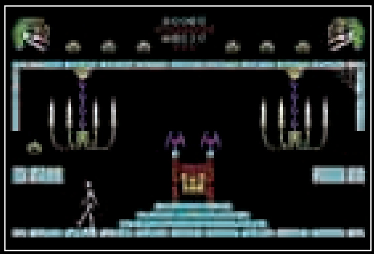
Despite problems, Brown was pleased with the final result. "The bouncing mechanism needed tweaking, but it turned out pretty much as I imagined," he says. His attention was then directed at creating a menagerie of beasties. Hunchbacks patrol corridors and bats swarm in the forest; elsewhere, huge, deadly spiders roam, and skeletons give chase. In one room, a banquet – complete with pig's head – rises from the table to attack the poor pumpkin. "The nasties were logical evolutions of those in *Cauldron*, and little touches, such as the flying banquet, came from group decisions after initial ideas from Brown," recalls Schembri. "The whole thing was very well storyboarded, and so changes were often made due to flashes of genius." Not every great idea made the game, though: Brown reckons, "50 per cent of my ideas ended up on the cutting-room floor", ideas such as the story being revealed by a book's pages turning. "Today, this is a simple and often-used technique, but it just wasn't possible in 64 KB," says Schembri. "But that's the nature of games," adds Brown, "there's never enough memory."

Again, the finished game was well received. *Zzap!64*'s Gary Penn said: "*Cauldron II* looks good, sounds good, and plays even better. Miss it and you'll regret it." Spectrum-land was just as enthusiastic: *Crash* called it, "a very playable and addictive game that's well worth the money," while *Your Sinclair*'s Phil South said: "if it doesn't rate highly in the charts very soon, I'll turn into a pumpkin myself." This high praise was justified for the Spectrum version, which hadn't suffered so much. "*Cauldron II* converted better because there was less reliance on smooth scrolling," explains Leinfellner, although Brown claims that "scrolling through the castle with the pumpkin would have been better" for all versions, but this "wasn't possible with the technology of the time."

The only real criticism was the game's difficulty, and Schembri notes that the team were aware of it: "We came to a group decision that it was too hard. Changes were made and the final version is definitely possible to finish." It's tricky to know how difficult to make a game he says: "Gamers feel cheated if they pay for a game and complete it in an afternoon, but the same is true if you can't get anywhere – it's a delicate balance." But with gamers still trying to free legions of bouncing pumpkins 20 years on, it's clear the Palace team did something right when crafting its duo of spooky games. "We put everything into all our games, and without meaning to sound big-headed, we knew they were good," says Brown. "That said, *Cauldron*'s level of success was unexpected. I guess good, uncomplicated gameplay and cuteness has given the *Cauldron* games longevity." Schembri also reckons solid teamwork helped make the games what they are: "There was great team spirit when working on them, and we were also pioneers, creating games at the start of the home computer explosion. If I'm honest, the celebrity element was exciting, although with the good comes the bad – there were many marathon sessions to meet deadlines and we'd often become human versions of the zombie sprite featured in the game."



» Climb the turret, ever higher – hero pumpkins never tire.



» The hag's crown sits upon the throne, guarded by a man of bone.



» Goblins guard the castle door, but water kills pumpkins for sure.



» Pull the lever, plug the floor, or drop down far and end up sore.

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** PALACE SOFTWARE
- » **DEVELOPER:** RICHARD LEINFELLNER, STEVE BROWN, STAN SCHEMBRI
- » **RELEASED:** 1985/6
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE EVIL DEAD
SYSTEMS: C64, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1984

THE SACRED ARMOUR OF ANTIRIAD
SYSTEMS: C64, ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1986

BARBARIAN
SYSTEMS: C64, ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, AMIGA
YEAR: 1987



遠くの稀で、エキゾチックなゲームを愛する人々のため

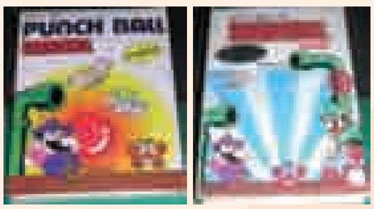
FULL OF EASTERN

NOT ONE GAME, BUT THREE WHICH NEVER LEFT JAPAN. THE TRUE "LOST LEVELS"

HUDSON'S LOST MARIO TRILOGY

When *Super Mario All-Stars* was released in 1993, the Western world became acutely aware of a *Mario* title it was originally denied – *Super Mario Bros. 2* on the Famicom Disk System. There are other games in the series that never left Japan, which few even know exist, and some of them are rather good.

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** HUDSON
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NEC PC-8801
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** 3000 YEN
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE FOR:** NEC'S 6001MKII AND 6601 RANGES, FUJITSU MICRO-7, SHARP X1
- » **CAN'T IMPORT?** THEN WHY NOT TRY: *SUPER MARIO BROS. THE LOST LEVELS*

If you're looking for a reworked version of *Mario Bros.*, but can't import an ancient Japanese micro with a copy of the game, and don't feel like breaking the law via emulation, then the original *Lost Levels* on various compilations is your closest option. It's like the original *SMB*, except surreally different.





Interesting fact
The PC-8801 and other Japanese micros are home to a library of not only strange exclusives, but also baffling console and arcade ports, such as *Pac-Man*, *Ice Climber*, and *Front Line*; looking at *Front Line*'s graphics you would think a child designed it.



» Conveyor belts, elevators, moving platforms, enemies, bonus rings, and so on. Level three offers a complex situation to negotiate.

メガ駆動機構

In a change to our usual format, Poychi Robo is covering THREE Eastern Promise games this month. All of them *Mario* titles, all of them for NEC's ancient PC-8801 home computer and all developed by Hudson. They were released between 1983 and 1986, though there's never been an official explanation as to why and how Hudson acquired the licence to work Nintendo's IP – presumably Nintendo wanted to profit from the computer market in Japan, and decided to let a more experienced company deal with development. Curiously, instead of porting the original *Mario Bros.* and NES' *Super Mario Bros.*, Hudson chose to remake them with gameplay changes and different levels. While the PC-8801 suffers from greater technical limitations than the NES – making the games inferior, as you're revisiting themes, albeit from a different angle – it means two decades later Hudson's forgotten trilogy plays fantastically. These three titles will make you look at the series in a different way.

MB PUNCH BALL

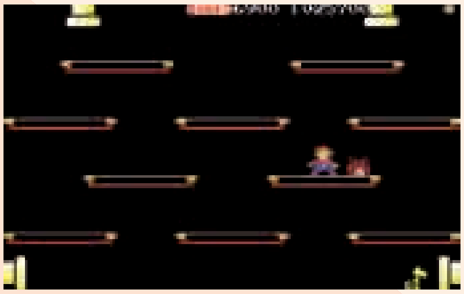
This is almost identical to the original *Mario Bros.*, except you can't knock enemies upside down by the hitting the platform they're standing on. The only way to defeat them is by hitting the POW block, or by throwing the Punch Ball, which Mario and Luigi carry around. The ball needs to be collected after every throw, but it gives the game an almost shooting-based quality. There are also some interesting level variations, such as one where all the platforms move left and right, making movement tricky. *MBPB* is awesome, making the original game seem new and fresh; it's baffling Nintendo has not considered re-releasing it on compilation.

MB SPECIAL

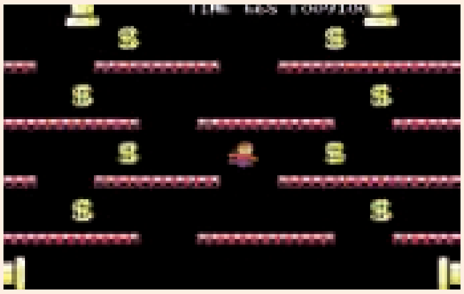
This is the odd one, coming across as a strange blend of the original arcade *Mario Bros.* and *Donkey Kong* games, featuring four levels – Hudson really went all out to make this version unique and exciting. Strangely it was released at a similar time to *Punch Ball*, though it's vastly



» This first level is trickier than it looks. The gaps in the platforms move quite quickly, and the switches at the top keep reverting to the off position.



» The trampolines in level two make for an unusual twist on the *Mario Bros.* formula. Sadly there are no guns or gunmen, that's a different game...



» Dollar signs, lots of dollar signs. Collect them all before the time runs out, and then grab the ring which appears, otherwise you get nothing.

superior in terms of enjoyment, making us curious as to why Hudson felt the need to develop two contrasting versions.

Regardless, it's a fantastic oddity and of such quality it should have been re-released. The first level is a series of four screen-spanning platforms, containing gap(s) that are in constant movement. The aim is to reach the top, repeatedly hit five switches until they turn red, and then use the exit. It's tricky, but is great fun. Level two sees the platforms replaced with ten trampolines, with enemies appearing from pipes up above. Bouncing on a trampoline with an enemy defeats it, resulting in the level exit. Level three gets quite complex (the best of the four), featuring four conveyor belts, a central elevator platform, multiple enemies, and later another moving platform which must be traversed to reach the exit. The final level is a variation of the traditional bonus coin-stages, except the coins have been replaced with giant dollar signs. All need to be collected, along with a ring, for any bonus points to be awarded.

The four levels are short but sweet, capturing the Nintendo ethos of the time. Had it instead been released on the NES, no one would know any different.

SUPER MB SPECIAL

The most ambitious of the three games, and as a result the one with the most problems; this tries to be a remake of *Super Mario Bros.* on the NES, and as a result has a greater level of depth and variety than the previous two titles.

Unfortunately it's an exercise in masochism. The designers at Hudson seem intent on punishing you for playing it in the same way as the original *SMB*, which ironically means it's great for retro-enthusiasts to examine now, but would have defeated the purpose of creating such a port back in the day. It was presumably to appease or appeal to computer owners who were eager to enjoy what their console-owning friends were enjoying, so the utterly absurd and at times surreal design changes would likely have alienated anyone expecting true *Mario*.

The big difference is that the screen doesn't scroll, but instead flicks across. Annoyingly you can see part of the next area, meaning the screen flicks across before Mario reaches the edge, totally destroying any sense of timing regarding precise jumps. Worse still, turtle shells bounce back off the edge threatening to kill unsuspecting players. Then there are pipes surrounded by structures, implying a secret warp, but leading to absolutely nowhere! Meanwhile invisible coin blocks are placed at the most infuriating of places, meaning just as you launch into what appears a clear and open jumping area, said block appears and sends you hurtling down a hole – such infuriating misplacement could only have been intentional! There are also fiendish puzzles, like in world 4-3, where you need to make both sides of an elevator drop off the string they are on, to make a platform appear two screens onwards. Failure to do so makes the stage impossible to finish. While the most fascinating to read about and contemplate, because of its sheer strangeness, the limitations, high difficulty, and general glitchiness it's the least fun to play.

CONCLUSION

We want to see this trilogy released on the Virtual Console at 500 Wii points, explaining the origin of such anomalies, and making them available for everyone to play. Certainly the first two covered are worthy, perhaps even being more enjoyable than the original they were both based on. Otherwise, Googling *Super Mario Bros. Special* will bring up Stuart Campbell's website where you can download the emulator with *SMBS*, or alternatively check out http://andre.facadecomputer.com/saw/pc88.html for an information page which leads to better things.



» *Mario Bros. Punch Ball* is an interesting take on an old formula, and surprisingly great fun. Why has Nintendo forgotten about these old games?



» YouTube user "powerfulnana" has 22 videos dedicated to PC-8801 games, with extensive *SMBS* coverage.

Special thanks to Andrew Fader for providing assistance, and also Stuart Campbell for making *Super Mario Bros. Special* freely available.

私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある

JOHN SZCZEPANIAK'S

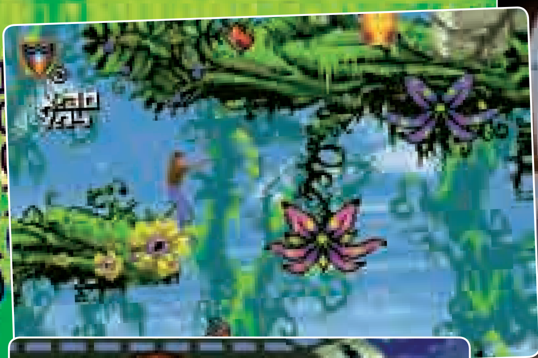
Gaming Illuminati

PART 2 OF 2





FOR OVER A YEAR JOHN SZCZEPANIAK INFILTRATED, GAINED THE TRUST OF AND SPENT TIME AMONGST THE MOST SECRETIVE OF UNDERGROUND VIDEOGAME SOCIETIES. SOME OF WHAT HE WAS ALLOWED TO TALK ABOUT AFTERWARDS IS PRINTED HERE, IN THE CONCLUDING PART TO OUR SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE REPORT ON THE COLLECTING COGNOSCENTI – THE GAMING EQUIVALENT OF THE ILLUMINATI.





» Retro Gamer acquired a digital version of the unreleased GBA *Flashback* sequel, *Flashback Legends*, by the defunct Delphine Software. Such is the life of the data dealer.

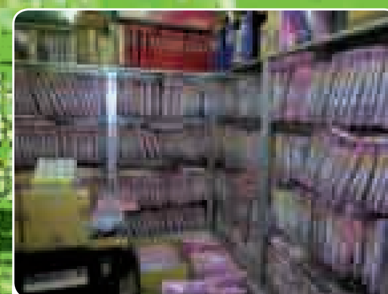




» **Top:** The Demo Vision utilises hardwired monochrome GB units to display games on a TV screen. Used to avoid eye-strain during testing, and at conventions. (Chris Covell) **Bottom:** For the ultimate collector. A Sophia Systems Sega Saturn Graphics Box, the kind used in developing games such as *Virtua Fighter 3* and *Shenmue*. (Chris Covell)



» Not all unique items are hidden away for private viewings by enlightened accumulators. These Intellivision Prototypes are often displayed at conventions. (Mayhem)



» Not everything needs to traded under the table with money from Swiss bank accounts. In Japan there are entire stores dedicated to rare and obscure arcade boards.

There have been some very big events over the past 18 months. The first is that a short playable Saturn demo of *Sonic Xtreme* surfaced, the seller being an ex-employee of Sega. It was sold via proxy in a private auction on ASSEMbler's website, with the final bid coming at a cheap $2,500, though only after a rather unpleasant fiasco involving betrayal and vindictive revenge. The community was shaken to its core, and a year later things are still in turmoil. Thankfully the demo ended up in the safe hands of a trusted collector, who then contacted Retro Gamer to provide exclusive information and emulated screenshots using Cassini (Issue 22). A piece of history was saved, though people reacted violently because it wouldn't be publicly released. One of the victims was ASSEMbler: "I find it ironic that the site was hacked over an item I was neither seller nor buyer of. The fan community of that unreleased game tried to raise enough money to buy it and failed, and in the resulting shit storm of anger and resentment I got flamed. As to the slander, a lot of people got themselves banned from the community because of that drama, and all of the sudden I'm reading posts on the net that accuse me of doing everything short of selling $99 laptops from Nigeria. It's like I said before, with extremes people just don't behave normally. I'll ban someone from the forum and all of the sudden they want to light my car on fire."

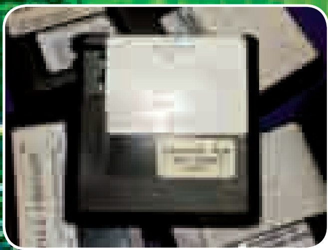
The second event was four blue 64DD development disks appearing, which may contain the unreleased *Mother 3*. Speculation is intense, but there are problems getting the disks to load; it requires specialist equipment, which is in short supply, but many are pledging assistance. Collectors are also reported to have offered undisclosed five-figure sums to own these disks, assuming they're genuine of course. A Grecian known as Barc0de, the biggest collector in his country, introduced himself during my enquiries regarding *Mother 3*. "I am in the honored position to be my country's biggest connoisseur on the subject of obscurity, and I try to pass my teachings and passion to others." It turned out Barc0de knew the original buyer (who wanted to remain unnamed), who then sold the disks on to a Canadian gentlemen (who promises to provide Retro Gamer with exclusive content should he manage to boot the disks).

Although I was forbidden to mention who the original dealer or his contact were, Barc0de's explanation was fascinating. "The original buyer of the Disks was on a trip to Japan, where he met with his contact. This was a former Sound Artist in a 64DD project, namely, if memory serves, *Mother 3*. Among the bulk of the items he received, were four disks with M3 written on them. The contact himself was uncertain of the contents of the disks. Nevertheless, considering the game was indeed fully completed, and debugging had already begun, along with plans to transfer the game to cartridge form, one can speculate that the disks might hold valuable data." Barc0de then offered his personal opinion, which, while speculation, reveals a great deal regarding the nature of the underground contacts network. "It would be tempting to think that a 64DD game would span across 4x64MB disks, but this seems to be unlikely, considering the fact that a transfer procedure was started, similar to that of *Paper Mario* (originally meant to be a 64DD title). In addition, it must be noted that 64DD code can be run directly from a computer, and the need to write to 64DD blue devdisks arises only for testing purposes. However, I must stress that once a project is terminated, software that is not archived is destroyed. The disks could have been de-magnetized completely, corrupted (using a 64DD dev command), or by natural wear-and-tear. If I had to guess, it all depends on the knowledge and honesty of the contact. If he knew the disks contained something, but honestly couldn't remember what, then there's a chance of striking gold (assuming the stuff survived termination process). But if he was dishonest, and knew that the disks were useless, he might have passed them off as valuable by claiming that he doesn't know what's on them."

Some unreleased games are legally so hot, corporations feverishly pursue those who have copies in order to stop them getting even a mere mentioning. Mr F from Florida elaborates, "There are a few wealthy collectors who have been generous and shared with the community, but companies dislike such people, and have

> "With extremes people just don't behave normally. I'll ban someone and all of a sudden they want to light my car on fire" ASSEMbler

Gaming Illuminati



» In October 1991 *Desert Strike* was known as *Beirut Breakout*; due to the Japanese's strong Samurai code of honour, it's mostly American developers like Electronic Arts who haemorrhage acquisitions.



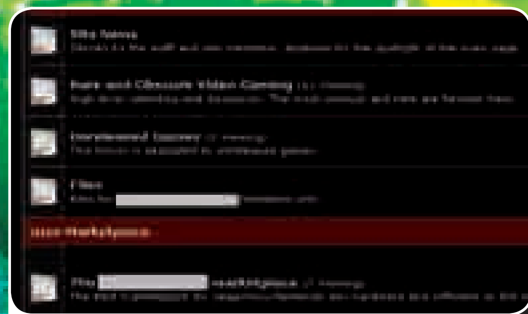
» A Saturn development setup. Notice the custom chip board in the back, and also the large development box underneath. Essential for running certain pieces of code.



» A selection of Japanese, UK and American SNES prototype cartridges. Collectors use these as tradable currency. (Nicola)



» The fabled *Biohazard 1.5* – it is a game whereby the owner would incur Capcom's legal wrath simply for speaking about it, since they know who he is. These are ancient press shots. (bioflames.com)



» Some forum communities have such tight security you will never find them. Others are publicly accessible and, with enough searching, can be discovered.



» How could one little demo cause so much chaos? We're still convinced there's a curse connected with *Sonic Xtreme*. Two of the development team nearly died after all.

threatened and/or taken legal action against them. Because of this, people who want to contribute to the community, and help build the archives, need to do so discreetly. Until the day that companies realise that people are interested in these games and would love to see them, archiving such information and media will remain a relatively underground task." With companies knowing which collectors have certain items, several community members demanded that I not speak of such things. I assure everyone I won't mention that people are playing *Shenmue* on the Saturn, or running the halls of the antiseptic looking *Biohazard 1.5* (the latter of which is indeed in someone's possession, but due to Capcom's legal department, they refuse to disclose further information).

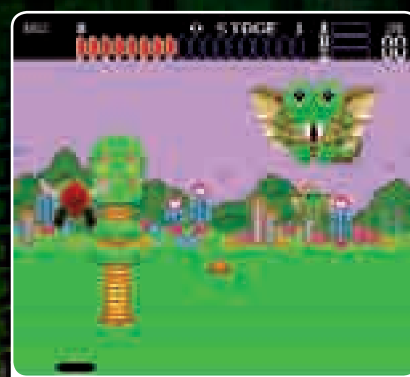
Community Camaraderie

And there I was, thinking I'd hit the big time when getting hold of *Propeller Arena*. Like so many previously exalted commodities, it's now common amongst the ranks, becoming part of the great online FTP data stores used for archiving – a treasure trove of illegal and oh-so-highly prized ones and zeros. I was desperate for access to the vaults, since the stories were almost too amazing to believe. But there had to be a vote by higher ranking members – no one has access to all the stores, meaning there's a firewall against anyone being compromised. If anyone outright said no I would be ousted, but while reluctant, one munificent soul did agree to grant access to a low level collection point. A server which absorbs all the non-exclusive data, normally found elsewhere on the net; basically a catch-all maintained by members in order to compare against their records of genuinely exclusive data found nowhere else. I was granted brief access to just one such secret and bountiful oasis of data, strictly for research purposes.

It was a dedicated server, of an undisclosed size, owned by Mr. F, who turned out to be one of many illustrious cognoscenti holding the keys to these FTP vaults, and he was also one of the most generous. He paid for the fastest connection in the local area, revealing "When I found out that not only was it possible to locate such items, and even share them on a wide-spread basis, my interest exploded and ever since I have felt that helping such a community was a worthy task. But while such things are true, I must admit I have always liked the idea of possessing items and knowing things few people have any clue about." The biggest files were upwards of 500mb unreleased CD-ROM games, like the full uncensored version of *Thrill Kill*, also *Propeller Arena*, *Half-Life DC*, *Penn & Teller* on Sega CD, and *Space Fantasy Zone* on the Turbo Duo (which another high ranking member, who had digital copies, refused to explain anything about when asked six months prior), plus so many more (for a time there were also some DVD based games, including once, a beta of *Okami* months before its official release). Admittedly several things could be found elsewhere, but there were no places which had everything collated together in this manner. There were over 100 Mega Drive betas (a mixture of unreleased and released, since both are desirable), around 50 NES, many SNES, Sega CD, Master System and, even the odd Saturn title (though nothing exciting). There were also things connected to games, such as rare televised shows and other video media.

They revealed just enough to substantiate the wild claims, and to hint at what lay beyond my reach – items too rare and sought after to even

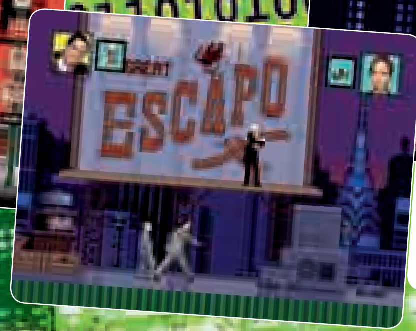
Several admitted to raiding the trash cans and dumpsters of large companies. The rewards for covering yourself in another man's detritus are high

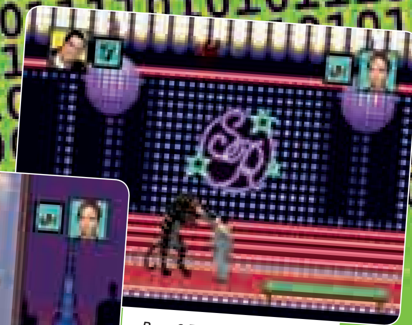


» The unreleased *Space Fantasy Zone* for the Turbo Duo is like a cross between *Fantasy Zone* and *Space Harrier*. It's out there, but not easy to find.









» *Penn & Teller's Smoke And Mirrors* on the Sega CD (two discs) was another public release by Lost Levels, around the end of 2005. It's utterly deranged and thoroughly post-modern.



» For a long time *Propeller Arena* was hailed as a grail which would never be leaked, but now it's easily available. Various covers floating around are by Segagaga's Yakumo.



» An incredibly rare PC-Engine development setup. What makes it unique is that it contains assets and code for an unreleased game. (ASSEMbler)

disclose the existence of: items too dangerous to have anything printed about them. I cursed my luck, but even if I did somehow get the needed FTP server addresses, there was no way to discover the individualised lengthy encryption codes needed for access. These watering holes are reserved specifically for loyal community participants, and are indicative of the camaraderie present. If you want to take, you have to give as well. Mr F explained. "Some people have gushed over how amazing and wonderful it is for someone to amass these things and be willing to share them. I archived such media until a time when I had the means to share it with others who cared to see what the corporations were hiding. Much of the software collected has been submitted either by contacts I know, or anonymous individuals who for various reasons I have decided to trust. At one point I was open to letting everyone have access, but it became a problem as everyone would come in, get what they wanted, and never contribute anything. After changing it so that I had to approve each person's access, I saw a dramatic improvement in how people treat the service I provide."

And playing by the rules certainly proves worth it, since within their bosom is kept all the aforementioned things, and more. There are also NDA-protected documents for nearly all hardware, not to mention an abundance of exclusive video footage and images. Plus other data, that would make a man's blood run cold with awe and envy. Regarding images and video it's interesting to examine the practice of watermarking, which takes on a whole new etiquette within this realm. Watermarking imagery is like marking your territory: it's a sign of prestige to provide such visual stimulation to hordes of followers, so of course it'll be signed; it's a way of protecting your acquisitions against unscrupulous journalists or websites who would steal them; it's like gangland colours of affiliation or graffiti tags which boost one's status. While some are fanatical about watermarking, others in the community openly despise it. Frank Cifaldi, who became increasingly hostile over the course of this article's formulation, suddenly turned malevolent when I asked his view on the subject. "I think the entire practice is retarded. Maybe I'll put DUMPED BY LOST LEVELS on the title screen of all of our hosted games because it's the same f*cking thing." Regardless, when speaking to the underground, the members were courteous, helpful, and happy to provide Retro Gamer with unwatermarked images in exchange for names being credited, such as one gentlemen from Italy named Nicola Ferrarese, who provided over 30 images of truly mind-boggling items. Though in the jovial spirit of territorial tagging I insisted on having prominent watermarks on as many as possible, along with caption-based crediting – except in some rare circumstances where the collector feared reprisals and insisted on remaining anonymous.

But how do communities acquire such hardware, software and data? Simple. Employee theft, company bankruptcy and liquidation, sheer luck, anonymous contacts, and several have admitted to raiding the trash cans and dumpsters of large companies. For a long time many companies never shredded discs or magnetically wiped the data from hardware, meaning the rewards for searching through the waste bins of a development house were high. Sega in the UK was mentioned prominently, with many a garbage-surfer acquiring unreleased games through the company's thoughtless disposal. Due to press deadlines, Sega were unavailable for comment.

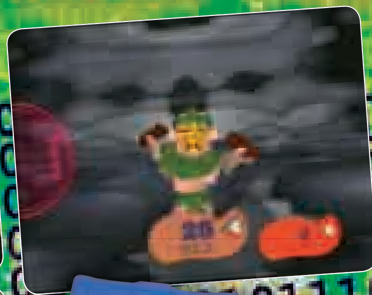
Other people set up dummy companies for the sole purpose of purchasing assets when others go into liquidation. It doesn't cost much to set up a registered company, allowing you to transcend the black market. ASSEMbler explains, "I have started my own company devoted to such efforts. It allows me to legally buy items, to have an ability to preserve whole failed companies or at least some of their assets as complete."

Good contacts are also essential, especially when trying to find gear in Japan. This network

These people were going into hiding, and they were arming themselves. "I wound up having to buy guns all because some nutjob really f*cking likes Sonic The Hedgehog, and went to town on me" ASSEMbler

Gaming Illuminati

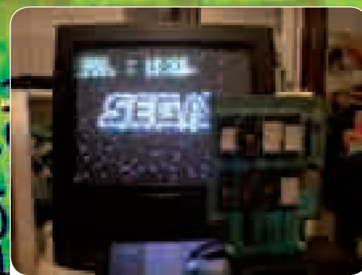








» The infamous blue *M3* development discs for the 64DD, having passed through many hands. What valuable data could they possibly contain? (coreycorey2000)



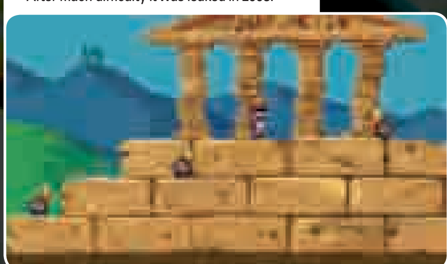


» Previously only rumoured to be real, we bring you concrete proof of *Iron Hammer* for the Mega Drive's unreleased VR Helmet. It's the only copy in existence. (Anonymous)



» Sometimes rare items of the orient slip through the collecting cracks and end up on Yahoo! Japan. Expect fierce bidding wars from Japan's most powerful collectors.

» The *Super Mario Wacky Worlds* CD-i beta was bought by Frank Cifaldi from RW Bivins for $1000. After much difficulty it was leaked in 2003.

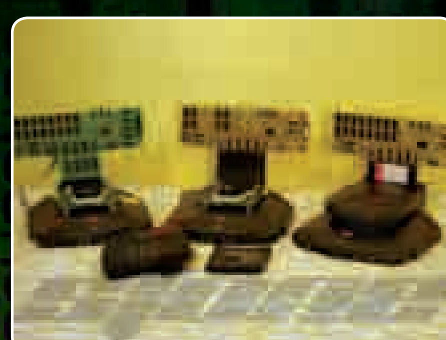


of corporate dealers in a way reflects the Gibson book *Neuromancer*, with shady meetings being arranged via proxy to drop off merchandise extracted from corporate vaults. But not everyone can be trusted, and having a good reputation is vital to both seller and buyer. Barc0de spoke more on this subject, "A contact's honesty and professionalism is essential for this underground market to grow and survive. Counterfeiters and people who sell things in bad faith, for a lot of money, hurt collectors and the community in general. Alas, even if one does make a mistake regarding his estimation over a subject, he should at least be honest enough to apologise and provide restitution afterwards."

The close-knit community spirit is strong, while the group is also deeply apprehensive of outsiders. When introducing himself Barc0de explained "I read your article on the subject, out of curiosity. I was quite reluctant to provide any information or material at first, to be honest, because many people bother us and often, our time is worth more than that." Another collector, who owns several undumped one-of-a-kind Dreamcast protos, accursedly stated "I don't talk about protos now – too many lamers, beggars and haters." Years of being hounded by internet lepers has made these people reluctant to talk. I asked ASSEMbler what the lowest point has been. "Lowest point had to be the *Sonic Xtreme* fiasco. Previous to that event I had tried to make myself as approachable as possible. I mean, you could reach me by AIM, MSN, phone, whatever. I often act as a broker for rare items, and sometimes people vent their frustrations on me. When that went to hell I got burned bad. DDOS [a type of network attack] lasted almost a week, email bombs, hack attacks, attempts to steal my paypal account, death threats, you name it. A community member's internet phone was DDOS'd and he was unable to call for help in an emergency situation. It was his only phone. Reactions like this made me pull back big time. You'll be lucky to get a glimpse now. I rarely post messages, and often use aliases. All my eBay auctions got bid to a million dollars, or were paid for with stolen credit cards. I was basically unable to sell and sustain my business." We chatted further, and I noted that after these catastrophic events the collectors went further underground. Several phone numbers, MSN addresses, and other contact details given to me were no longer valid. He explained why his compatriots were suddenly fearful of the press, "I'd say people saw what happened to me and went way, way underground. You could probably find Osama Bin Ladin before you'll find the extreme collectors market again after all that nonsense. Over a thousand pissed off 16-year-olds flaming the shit out of you for a month, because you didn't give them a free ISO file of a $3000 one-of-a-kind unreleased *Sonic* game does not endear oneself."

These people were going into hiding, and they were arming themselves. "I wound up having to buy guns because of that bullshit. All because some nutjob really, really f*cking likes *Sonic The Hedgehog*, and went to town on me," ASSEMbler said.

These communities have no promotion, those who seek the rare find their own way.



» Three Atari Jaguar CD development kits, with all the related equipment. People who own this kind of setup aren't merely collectors, they're homebrew coders. (Stone)

The underground community organised the sale of several hundred Megajets, which had been stolen in Indonesia



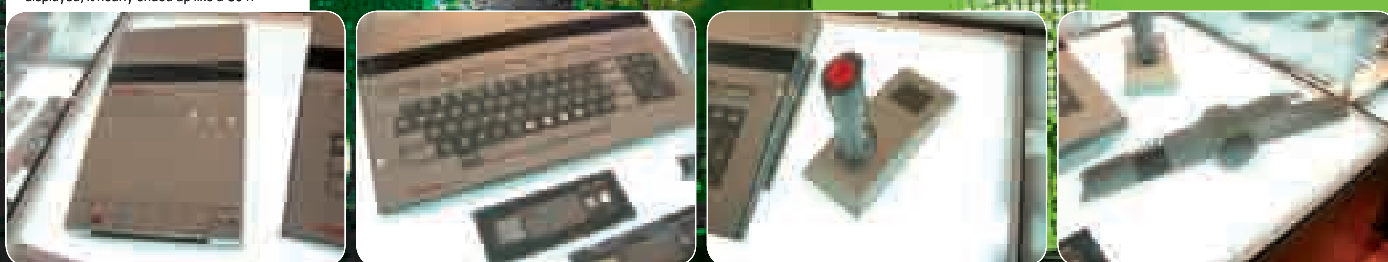


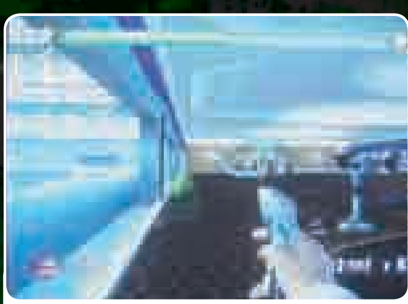
» The RDI Halcyon laser-disc unit (only two games released) is one of the most prestigious and coveted of grails, which not even ASSEMbler has yet acquired. (98PaceCar)



» *Shenmue*, along with *Virtua Fighter 3*, are two Saturn prototypes which both collectors and the masses are eager to get hold of.

» At Nintendo World the original prototype designs for the NES (along with keyboard, tape recorder, joystick, and lightgun) are proudly displayed; it nearly ended up like a C64!





» *Take The Bullet* was being developed by Red Lemon Studios in the UK. Never released, finished copies somehow made it into the hands of a private collector. (Annonymous)

Readers seeking them out should avoid the social faux-pas of demanding free access to items, as ASSEMbler points out, "I would release all I have, but the result is that I can be held legally accountable. Information wants to be free, and eventually it will be, but not with my name directly attached. I shouldn't be expected to give away the fruits of hard labour. People sometimes distort my collecting of rare items into a perception that I am withholding something they are entitled to."

Even if you relentlessly pursue this underworld, some doors will forever remain locked. There are secret, strictly guarded, members-only IRC channels and message boards. Like a maze within a labyrinth, in them resides a small group of maybe 20 of the most wealthy and powerful. If a floundering company has items they want, they simply buy said company and all of its assets. A few of them were generous enough to allow for an interview, albeit sans recording devices. In a smoke-filled room with low lighting, one regaled me about the time he privately shipped a Harley Motorcycle to Japan in exchange for a one-of-a-kind piece of hardware. Another muses about the time he had to call Korea and explain that a mysterious MSX labelled package did not, in fact, contain MSX missile parts. The episode I found most interesting was the tale of when high profile members of the underground community organised the sale of several hundred Megajets, which had been stolen in Indonesia by a sea-based criminal organisation (pirates, basically). Prices rose alarmingly and, as mentioned in Issue 27 of Retro Gamer, most Megajets currently on the market come from that source. Members are collaborating to create the ultimate tome of all their adventures, an endless account which is forever being written. It's been one hell of an adventure since the early 1990s when these clans began emerging in the formative years of BBS systems.

When conversing among these super elite, one starts to notice familiar people. I've recognized several who frequent various other online communities, often holding moderator positions, or figurative positions as prominent speakers: people whose connections go right to the top. Look at the forums where Retro Gamer is discussed. Within these you will find elite international collectors and dealers, moving like shadows amongst the loquacious debates. They are watching you and the words you type, waiting to pounce upon fresh information regarding the next quarry to go after. There is a network of spies on every forum, pseudonyms hidden among forumites like the Illuminati or Freemasons among normal society: an underground secret society for the digital age, dealing in knowledge and acquisitions not meant for plebeian society. They are like a secret hive archiving information which would otherwise be lost – virtual bookkeepers who are everywhere.

Before parting company with these people, who I had only just begun to fully understand, I asked what was in store for the future? As head of the community, ASSEMbler took the lead to reveal some plans. "I'm founding a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of videogame history. Namely the development hardware, betas, original artwork. Everyone dies someday and hopefully all of this will wind up at the Smithsonian for generations to wonder at. It's a mission to me, someday people will realise how important all this was." He's making a brave move to offer these things to the public. A display of true altruism, despite the problems that have occurred, the man is seen by some as a genuine pioneering hero and just the person needed to lead things forward into a new era.

Then I was out of the loop, feeling like a man who chooses the blue pill, waking up knowing there is something else out there, but that I would would never again be able to experience it. There exists beneath this great hobby of ours forces of power and control, legionnaires of enlightenment, data dealers, hackers, crackers, digital agents and unseen cognoscenti in possession of the works of others who no longer even realise they exist. It is the realm of the gaming obscura, and for most of us this world will remain forever hidden. There is so little known about these things and so much to learn. Just how far does the rabbit hole go?

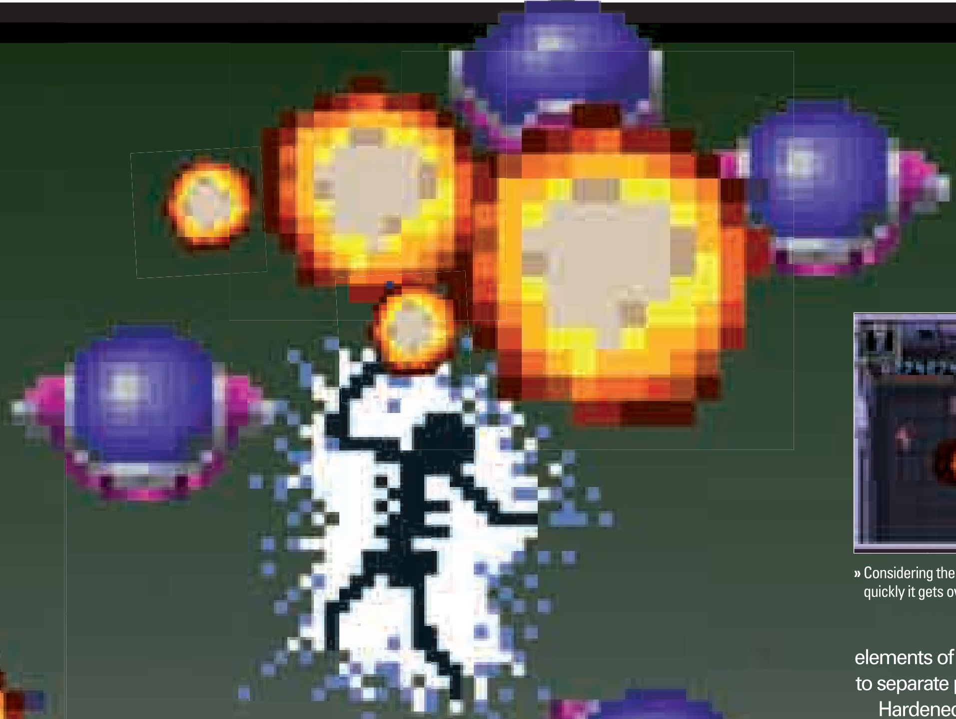
Many special thanks to the ASSEMbler community for providing assistance and images. Without their generous help this article, and the secret information it reveals, would never have been made available to the world. Let the data revolution start here!

THE MAKING OF...

SMASH TV

Williams' Robotron 2084 is undoubtedly one of the greatest games of all time. So, with such a high standard to live up to, how did Eugene Jarvis create a sequel that managed to be equally as well loved? Ashley Day investigates…





The answer is simple. *Smash TV* captured the spirit of the times perfectly. Where *Robotron* had defined the mood of the Eighties by distilling twitch gaming to its purest form in order to ride the wave of score-attack shooters that were the bread and butter of the arcade scene back then, *Smash TV* took the tried-and-tested twin-joystick play mechanic and wrapped it in a distinctly early-Nineties shroud. This meant using advanced graphical technologies to fill the screen with as much gore as possible – a trend Williams itself had set with the exploding body parts of *NARC*, and would go on to master through the Fatalities of *Mortal Kombat*. The game also called upon popular movie references, most notably *Running Man*, to maximise its appeal to that decade's teenage gamers. With an almost clinically addictive gameplay mechanic and a graphical theme designed to lure in the millions of testosterone-fuelled boys around the world, there was no way *Smash TV* could fail. Yet, as Eugene Jarvis recently revealed to us, the game's transition to the coin-op screen was far from assured.

"The game was the result of a collaboration between Mark Turmell (*NBA Jam, NFL Blitz, NBA Ballers, Sneakers*), John Tobias (*Mortal Kombat*) and myself. Mark was a big *Robotron* fan, especially of the dual-joystick play mechanic and he inspired us to do some kind of sequel," reveals Jarvis who is first to admit that making a sequel to *Robotron* was a most daunting prospect and that a "spin-off" was a much more desirable approach. "There are really two reasons a sequel is made for a game: first, for strictly commercial reasons, and second, because the designers had more stuff they wanted to explore, or improve on the original. *Robotron* had such amazing gameplay that, like *Tetris*, it was not obvious how to improve it. And since *Robotron* was made shortly before the videogame crash, a commercial sequel was not explored at the time. The other problem was that players never tired of the original." The decision was made to retain the key elements of *Robotron*'s gameplay, adding new features to bring it up to date. "The wave-based game continued to be the main genre in the arcades. *Smash TV* added in the boss monsters and the ability to continue a game, which were the dominant play elements of its later era. It was all designed to separate players from their quarters."

Hardened *Smash TV* players will agree that the boss monsters represented the standout moments of the arcade game. These screen-filling, biomechanical monstrosities sent the player's adrenaline sky-high and elevated *Smash TV* from a compulsive shooter to a memorable experience that compelled the player to return to the game just to see what grotesque creation they had missed before. Where did these imaginative bosses come from? "The bosses were a great collaboration between Turmell, Tobias, me, Tim Coman and the rest of the team. Tobias created the art, pixel by pixel, doing all the 3D rotations and rendering in his head.

It was an unbelievable feat that no one would attempt today with all the 3D-MAX and Maya art packages out there. Turmell and I handled the heavy coding, and the team just tried to envision our worst



» Considering the size of the playing area, it's amazing how quickly it gets overcrowded.

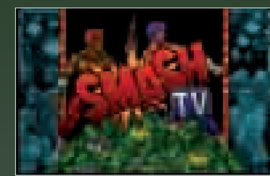


» The slightest touch and you'll be fried to a cinder. You be careful out there.





IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** WILLIAMS
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £60+ (PCB BOARD)



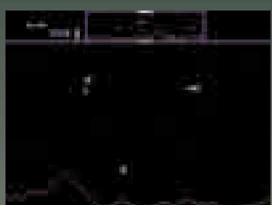


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DEFENDER
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1980

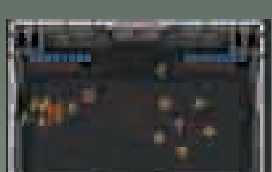
STARGATE
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1981

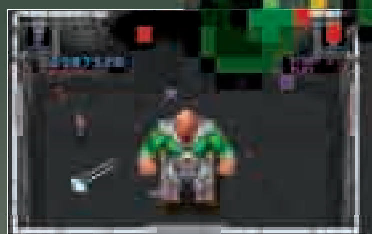
ROBOTRON
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1982



TESTING TIMES

Unlike the expensive game development industry of today, early arcade designers didn't have huge 'quality assurance' departments to ensure that their games were up to scratch. "It's hard to imagine today, but back in the Eighties at Williams/Bally/Midway there were no play testers; it was the team that played the game – especially the sound guys who seemed to have a lot of time on their hands. I was at the Game Developers Conference on a lecture about game development, and the speaker said the key to his team's success was actually making the development team play the game. The industry is so specialised today with testers and overtaxed developers, that often the development team never plays the game. This is why a lot of games are crap; the chefs don't eat their own cooking. So we would play the game a lot in-house to catch most of the bugs, but the really bizarre bugs were found in the field test. So our testers were really paying arcade players."





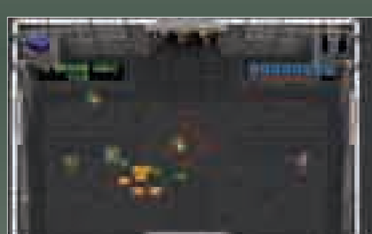
» Mutoid Man is the first boss you face and a good indication of the toughness to come.



» The addition of a second player was a stroke of genius and brought an intense rivalry to the core gameplay.

nightmares. The flatface guy was obviously inspired by Sinistar, the Cobra is some kind of Indiana Jones-type deal gone wrong, and Mutoid Man was kind of like the tanks from *Robotron*, *Terminator*, and some twisted Tim Burton nightmare. Only at the end of the project did we come up with the idea of the Host subbing for Mutoid Man – we had to crank out another boss in a hurry – the underwear thing was pure Tobias genius."

Coming up with a concept that remained faithful to *Robotron* while also heading in a bold, new direction had proved a tricky yet manageable feat of videogame design, but Jarvis and co weren't out of the woods. *Smash TV* was to be developed by a mostly new team of coders – many of whom hadn't made a commercial game before – which led to a couple of unique problems for the senior design staff. "We had a lot of start-up problems on the game," recalls Jarvis. "A big problem we had was that the team had a lot of new members and breaking in the new coders was time consuming. Also, this was Mark's first coin-op project,



» Winning a VCR was one vision of the future that didn't prove to be true.

and John Tobias' first videogame. It was tough getting up to speed for the new guys. We hired this one new programmer, Robby Ashworth, and he was just getting nowhere with the enemy coding after several months. So Mark sat down with him and realised that he couldn't see his screen. Mark took him down to the eye doctor and bought him some glasses, and his coding proficiency skyrocketed."

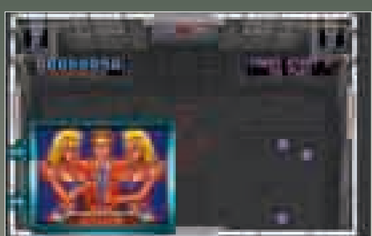
Another major problem was that the 15-month development time simply wasn't long enough to fit in everything that they intended. As a consequence *Smash TV*'s fabled hidden Pleasure Domes became the stuff of legend and frustration for many dedicated players. "The truth is we ran out of time and had to ship the game, and so the domes never got done," reveals Jarvis, "but anything we actually did would have been a disappointment so it turned out to be pure genius." Jarvis continues, "The original coin-op release had no Pleasure Domes. It was a total scam to keep players going for some impossible goal. The keys didn't do anything. People would call up and ask how to get into the Pleasure Domes and we would ask them how many keys they picked up and where, and then we'd say they needed to get such and such key in a certain room, as well as other things we couldn't tell them. The players searched for months. Finally, liars started posting on the internet that they had found the Pleasure Domes – which was impossible – but it just egged on the other players. After about six months, management somehow figured out it was a scam, and we had to go back and do a new release with the Pleasure Domes in it."

Just like every other arcade game of the period, as *Smash TV* approached completion it was sent into location tests around selected arcades in America to gauge its potential revenue. "Probably the craziest thing," remembers Jarvis, "was when we first put the game out on test at Times Square Arcade on Broadway in Chicago; I think it is a gay disco now. Anyway, we had only done the first three waves in the game and we were doing an early test, so we set the game up and the players mobbed it right away. A couple of really tough-looking guys got into the third wave which never ended – basically played forever – and we didn't want to be around when the players figured out there was no fourth wave after putting 20 bucks in the machine, so we split for some pizza. We get back to the arcade about an hour later, and the same two guys are still in wave three. It was crazy – they were playing in an

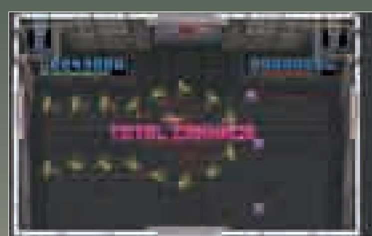
"TOBIAS CREATED THE ART, DOING ALL THE 3D ROTATIONS AND RENDERING IN HIS HEAD; IT WAS AN UNBELIEVABLE FEAT" EUGENE JARVIS



> THE ORIGINAL RELEASE HAD NO PLEASURE DOMES. IT WAS A TOTAL SCAM TO KEEP PLAYERS GOING FOR SOME IMPOSSIBLE GOAL" EUGENE JARVIS



» This greasy, little fellow was inspired by characters from *RoboCop* and *The Running Man*.



» No prizes for guessing where Jarvis got the title of *Smash TV*'s sequel.

adrenaline frenzy. Then the game crashes. The screen freezes, and all the colours go psychedelic. The players look at each other in frustration. The game resets, and those guys stuck in another ten bucks and started playing again. At that point we knew the game was good."

As development continued on *Smash TV* it was tested further and it became increasingly clear to Jarvis that his game was destined for success. "It rocked," exclaims the veteran developer when we ask how gamers reacted to the finished game. "People would walk up and dump 50 coins into the game for starters. It was amazingly addictive and funny. The effects were awesome, from Mutoid Man's blood-boil decapitation to player death by mine where your eyeball and other bits and pieces flew up to the camera. The players loved the intense action and massive depth. The co-op gameplay was also fun although there were big bragging rights at bonus time for the points leader, which added a competitive element to the mix."

One particular element that appealed to gamers was the diverse range of collectable weapons that allowed for ever more exaggerated means of destruction. "The genius of the weapons system was the power-up concept and the proper percentaging and placement of the power-ups. The system was the brainchild of Mark Turmell. We incorporated some of the funniest elements of past games, such as the smart bomb of *Defender*, the firepower of the power-up ships in *Galaga* and *Xevious*-style games, as well as some crowd-pleasers like the saw blades. The genius of the system was the result of massive play testing and balancing."

Finally, as the group had anticipated, the many references to movies of the late-Eighties struck a chord with arcade goers of 1990. "The black guy/white guy team thing was a big deal back in the Eighties with *Miami Vice*, *Die Hard*, and other action line-ups. We had also done it in *NARC* – our previous release – and we found it was very cool to be the black guy," comments Jarvis on one of many movie parallels in the game. "The twisted MC was a combination of RoboCop and Running Man's announcer. To this day *RoboCop* is my favourite movie".

Jarvis closes the interview by musing on the possibilities of an update to the *Smash TV* franchise. "You'd go full 3D, maybe with both third-person view and full, immersive first-person viewpoint. You'd flesh out the story even more: more action, more blood, more T and A, more everything. *Dead Or Alive Beach Volleyball* meets *Mortal Kombat*…" And while the prospect of a gore-filled flesh-fest might amuse the great developer, we're confident that the continued appearance of *Smash TV* on retro compilations and on Live Arcade shows that Jarvis' early-Nineties design is still popular enough to keep such 3D remakes the stuff of imagination for a few more years at least.



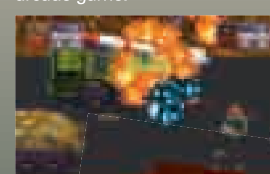
» Stepping on a mine caused your player to explode in a shower of gore. Later levels became a literal minefield.



» Anyone who's ever watched *Running Man* will instantly notice the similarities between it and *Smash TV*.

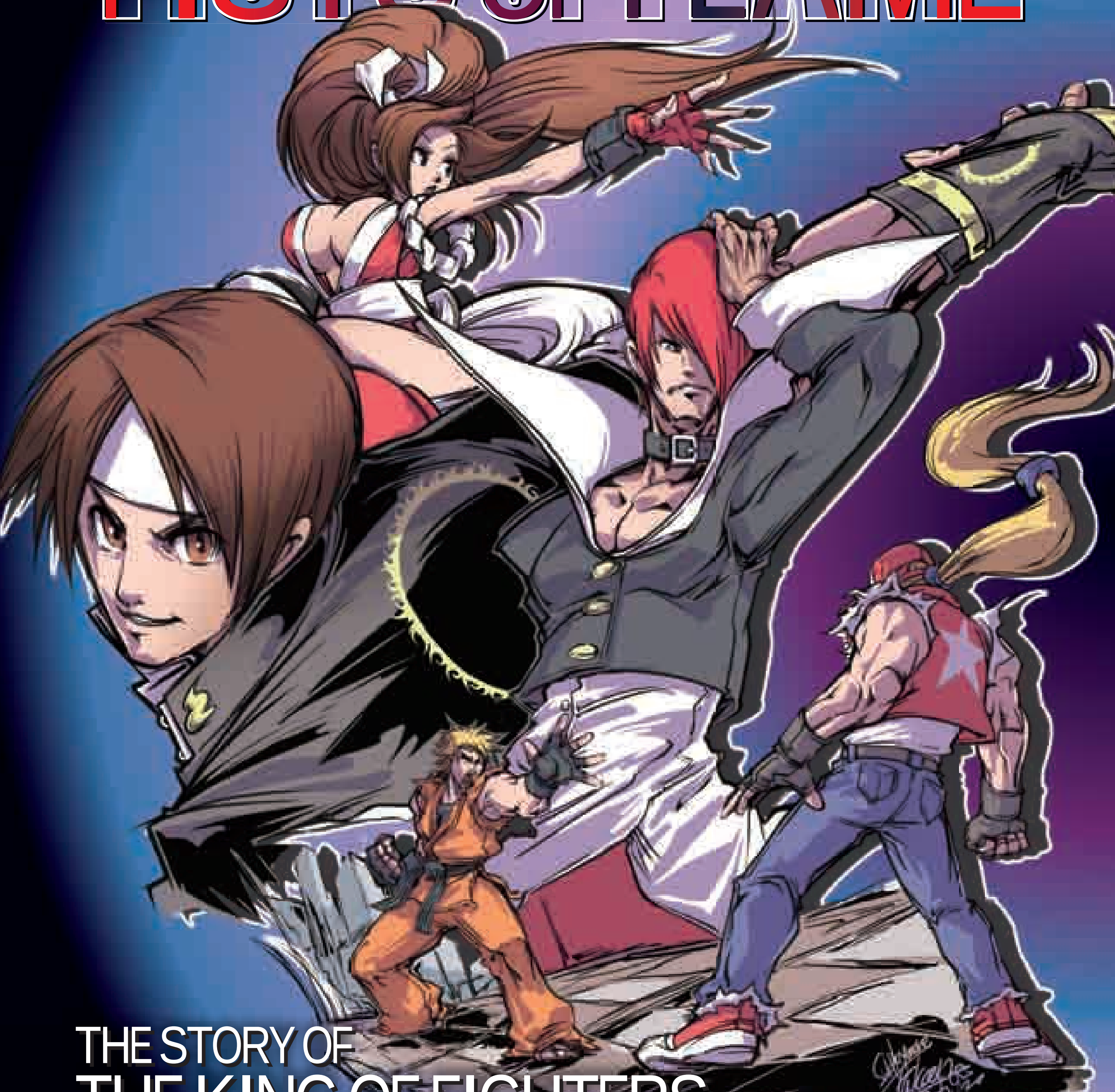
SMASH PSP

Smash TV may have been a semi-sequel to *Robotron*, but the 1990 coin-op has since inspired many more games than its spiritual predecessor. Despite receiving a minor console 'upgrade' in the form of *Super Smash TV*, the next chapter in the series is widely regarded as the 1991 arcade game, *Total Carnage*. Also by Midway, it used the same great twin-stick controls, but instead of taking place in confined arenas, it plunged you into a vertically scrolling shooter more like *Mercs* than anything. Like *Smash TV*, the game was two-player co-operative and featured an element of political satire. Instead of being set in an American future however, the satire was much closer to home, as the documentation in *Midway Arcade Treasures* reveals that it was intended as a parody of the first Gulf War and that the main villain was a caricature of Saddam Hussein. The tale of *Smash TV*'s heritage doesn't end there though, as the 2005 PSP game *GTA: Liberty City Stories* features a side-quest called 'Slash TV' in which the protagonist must kill several waves of enemy. The camera even pulls back from the over-the-shoulder view to a top-down perspective more akin to Midway's original arcade game.





FISTS OF FLAME



THE STORY OF THE KING OF FIGHTERS

STREET FIGHTER MAY HAVE BEEN MORE POPULAR IN THESE PARTS, BUT IN THE EAST, KING OF FIGHTERS RULED THE ARCADES WITH A FLAMING PURPLE FIST. HARDCORE 2D FIGHT FANS ARE GENERALLY SPLIT BETWEEN THE TWO, BUT SEAN SMITH TIPS HIS TERRY HAT TOWARD THE KOF CAMP, WITH A LITTLE HISTORY LESSON...

Let's be honest. Take away sports games and anything involving Mahjong tiles or even *Puyo Puyo* beans, and there aren't many videogame franchises that last beyond a decade, with a regular sequel ratio that amounts to more than one every year. But what did you expect from a flagship series borne of the legendary Neo Geo hardware, one of the longest supported home consoles of all time?

Arcade developer SNK began by making the occasional scrolling shooter, *Commando*-esque fare like *Ikari Warriors*, and oddments like *Beast Busters*, with reasonable success. But the arrival of its Neo Geo system both at home and in the coin-op arena saw the company move in a direction with which it's now more heavily associated: one-on-one fighting games. We were lucky enough recently to be able to speak with SNK Playmore's Akihito Kadowaki who acknowledges their debt to this trend shift: "It's safe to say that we really grew up once we started to release 2D fighting franchises such as the *Fatal Fury* and *Samurai Shodown* games." And grow they did. *Fatal Fury* laid down the foundations, *Art Of Fighting* added scaling trickery and immense sprites, while *Samurai Shodown* gave us one of the first weapons-based fighters, with a deep and satisfying combat system.

The term and indeed the concept of the 'King Of Fighters' tournament originated in the fictional US city of Southtown, way back in the original 1991 *Fatal Fury*. A fighting tourney arranged by evil crime overlord Geese Howard, it was revisited in *Fatal Fury Special* and *Art Of Fighting 2*, before 1994 saw SNK release *The King Of Fighters '94* – the first in the long running series, and a fully realised tournament set in various locations around the world. Debuting on MVS hardware, the title was a bold mish-mash of characters and themes from other SNK games, including *Ikari Warriors*, *Fatal Fury*, *Art Of Fighting* and lesser-known fare such as *Psycho Soldier*. The game deviated from other one-on-one fighters of the same period by having teams of three characters that were selected as a unit rather than picking just one avatar with which to kick ten bells out of your opponent. The characters could not, at this stage, switch in real-time (this would come later), but the order in which they fought could be selected, elimination style. It was possible to summon characters from the sidelines when you were getting particularly toed-in, although this was a far simpler game mechanic to the 'striker' system that would debut in later instalments and it was eventually abandoned in *KOF '97*.



» *KOF 99*'s bunch of reprobates led by Mr C.

King Of Fighters '94 was fast and frantic, with a whopping array of moves, and a chargeable power meter that, once full, allowed a super whizzy special move to be unleashed. This was drawn from the Deadly Rave ability present in the earlier *Fatal Fury* games, but made much simpler with easier-to-input commands and a better feeling of control over when you decide to execute the attack. Did we mention that the boss character rocks hard? Harder than Bison/Vega? Rugal Bernstein is a recurring *KOF* character who debuted in the original game. An evil German arms dealer with a dicky eye and a supreme array of uber-powerful attacks.

KOF '94 was a massive success in Japanese arcades, and went on to sell by the bucketload for the Neo homecart and, later, CD systems – the latter featuring a kick-ass CD soundtrack. As part of the recently celebrated *KOF* tenth anniversary,



» S Blaaarrghhh! He may be Mr Karate, but he is regretting those 12 pints and prawn vindaloo.


» Mai Shiranui – the buoyant-jugged Queen of gashapon. Would.

FISTS OF FLAME





» A typically excellent still *KOF* portrait.

SNK Playmore decided to give *'94* the remake treatment. The recent *KOF '94 Re-Bout* was a lovingly produced title for PlayStation 2 (an Xbox release was planned but canned), which delighted older fans and no doubt attracted new ones with an updated graphical style, and some superb extras included in the form of PS2 reproductions of the classic Neo Geo arcade stick and Neo Geo CD joypad, and a lavishly illustrated book or 'mook.' As anniversary releases go, this was a cut above the usual 'special edition' packages and even included a perfect emulation of the original game. So how did this remake come about and who was involved?

"Originally, we discussed we wanted to do something to celebrate the tenth year anniversary of the *KOF* franchise internally," Kadowaki told us. "The *KOF '94 Re-Bout* project was decided as this title had not been converted to the PS2 platform. During the project meeting, there were many ideas such as upgraded graphics, a remake of Neo Geo joystick, a special package, and so on." And were the SNK-heads pleased with the results? "The title ended up looking terrific, and I'm really pleased with the final product." Damn straight. The intro sequence alone is worth the admission price.

Ten years though – there must have been a big internal party, right? "There was *KOF*'s year-end party (unfortunately held in Japan only) celebrating the tenth year anniversary of *KOF*. It was not a simple sales promotion; we invited many *KOF* fans in Japan and enjoyed this event together with SNK fans and our staff. It was very successful and we would hope to hold such a year-end party every year!" We are betting that most diehard *KOF* fans would have given their grandmother to be involved in that particular shindig. Indeed, we are considering holding our own *KOF* bash here at Retro Gamer, with John Szczepaniak currently in pole position for a Mai Shiranui cosplay slot.

But we digress. While there was no discernible storyline at the original *King Of Fighters '94* stage, it introduced Team Japan and its three characters, led by the enigmatic Kyo Kusanagi and featuring camp-as-Christmas hairpiece Benimaru and Neanderthal strongman Goro. SNK was so delighted by the performance of the initial game, that it almost instantly began working on a sequel – which would feature a wealth of new options and characters, as well as a bonkers storyline so the fans had some sort of idea as to why all these crazy dudes were fighting in the first place. *The King Of Fighters '95* was the imaginatively named follow-up, beginning the first of several *KOF* story arcs, in this case the 'Orochi saga.'

The remainder of this article could waffle on about Orochi, and indeed a cursory glance to the internet reveals ream upon ream of information about the story, invoking Gnosticism, ancient Chinese proverbs and discussions of the minutiae of his special moves. To cut a long story short, Orochi is a long-dormant elemental god capable of extraordinary power, destruction and flames and stuff, who was sealed away nearly 2,000 years ago by descendants of Kyo Kusanagi, and the ancient Yata clan. Fast-forward a bit, about 700 years, and another clan, the Yagami, did a bit of a blood-pact deal with the powers that be, allowing them to take on the power of the Orochi.



» An example of your actual *KOF* comic book, guv'nor.

> "ORIGINALLY, WE DISCUSSED WE WANTED TO DO SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE THE TENTH YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE KOF FRANCHISE INTERNALLY" AKIHITO KADOWAKI



» The classic four-button Neo line-up was perfect for *KOF*, and transcends language barriers.



» Action on the mono Neo Geo Pocket. Check the detail – bloomin' marvellous.

This amounted to inheriting incredible strength and the ability to wield natty purple flames, albeit at the cost of eternal torment and a shortened life expectancy. Dash forward even further, to the present (well, *KOF '95-'96* sort of time) and the murder of the leader of the Yata clan unfortunately breaks the seal and – bosh – our boy Orochi is back in the game. Cue the appearance of purple flame-tastic Iori Yagami, a series of highly charged battles, set-tos and kidnaps, and Kyo's struggles against the rise of four elemental heavenly kings intent on resurrecting the original form of Orochi, and you begin to realise that conceptually, *The King Of Fighters* was a bit of an advancement on your average fighter, and was perfectly balanced for sequel upon sequel, even if the plot does come second to the excellent gameplay for most fans.

Anyways, *KOF '95* had arrived, and allowed players to customise their three-character team for the first time. It also introduced a handful of new faces, including the incredibly popular Iori, and was the first in the series to receive multiformat conversions. Arriving on PlayStation (with horrendous loading times), Saturn (RAM-cart enhanced, very competent) and Game Boy (as *Nettou: The King Of Fighters '95*, with an added character from *Samurai Shodown*), it became popular in the home in much the same way as it conquered the arcades.

KOF '96 on the other hand was a real benchmark release, and one which many long-time fans still consider the finest the series has to offer. It featured the continuation of the batshit-crazy Orochi storyline, but for the first time the whole graphical engine was given a fresh lick of paint, with redrawn sprites, better animation and thumping sonics. It also gave good fan service by adding a new team of 'boss' characters: the foul triumvirate of Wolfgang Krauser (booo!), Geese Howard (double booo!) and pimped-out mack daddy Mr Big (yaay!). Going back to *'96* today is rewarding. It stripped away the somewhat repellent rock-hard-ness of the first two games, spruced everything up, and featured excellently balanced gameplay. It once again appeared on home 32-bit formats and in *Nettou* form on Nintendo's monochrome handheld.

It is worth noting that *'96* was and still is the last time that *The King Of Fighters* was dramatically overhauled in the graphics department, with many of the sprites from the game being re-used with minimal tweaking even right up to the most recent releases. While the gameplay, sounds, and even the backdrops have been improved tenfold, the lack of redrawn and more impressively animated sprites has generally grated on fans, particularly when you stand a later series instalment against something like *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, or *Real Bout 2* – both of which feature far prettier visuals than any Neo-Geo-based *KOF* sequel. Each *KOF* is discussed with incredible fervour



» The beautiful '96 arcade marquee jobby.

IT'S NOT ALL FIGHTING

The King Of Fighters is traditionally a 2D fighter, right? Well, not really. There have been some truly odd incarnations involving SNK's motley crew of scrapping hardcases. Cases in point include Japan-only fare such as Saurus-developed MVS title *Quiz King Of Fighters* (imagine Capcom's *Quiz And Dragons*, but with *KOF* characters), Neo Geo Pocket board game *King Of Fighters: Battle De Paradise* and numerous tenuous mobile phone games – Mahjong (shudder), volleyball (!), cards, slot machines, and even a dating sim using *KOF* characters! In much the same way that *Samurai Shodown/Spirits* got the RPG treatment for Neo Geo CD, the PSone title *King Of Fighters: Kyo* lent role-playing elements to a plot that canonically fits in to the whole Orochi thing, with Kyo obviously the lead character. Only those who can read kanji need apply.



» *Quiz King Of Fighters*. It is D, you fool!

FISTS OF FLAME



» Game Boy Advance looks the biz, and would be fun were it not for the crap controls.

UNCOVERING FALCOON

Who is Falcoon? Well, the talent behind some of the excellent artwork on display in this issue (including our exclusive opening art) is none other than Tatsuhiko Kanaoka, a SNK Playmore employee who began as an independent fan-artist, whose excellent renditions of characters from various game franchises, including *The King Of Fighters* and *Street Fighter II*, led to the company taking him on as an artist and designer. He originally worked for the old SNK as a designer for the superb *Card Fighters Clash* titles, before re-joining them in their Playmore guise to create the character designs and artwork for much of the Neo Geo release *SNK vs Capcom: SVC Chaos*, which was in parts derided for its gameplay but universally praised for its superb re-imaginings of Capcom character stalwarts. Falcoon has designed most of the new *KOF* characters in recent times, and now fronts Playmore's *Maximum Impact* series.



» Unhinged and rather scary, Yamazaki is probably sectionable under the Mental Health Act

among fans, particularly on the internet. Fan dissent is usually focused on the lazy overuse of character sprites. We asked Kadowaki how SNK Playmore feels about this, and whether it listens to fans: "We often check our fan site as our fans' opinions and comments are sometimes very instructive and useful to us. Regarding the lack of redrawn character sprites, we are in fact constantly redrawing characters, although we should use more devices that show this more clearly. Please expect to see a noticeable difference in the next *KOF* title." This hopefully alludes to the recent promise that *King Of Fighters XII*, created on Taito's Type-X2 arcade hardware, is set to feature the first complete overhaul of the franchise since *'96*…

Back on track, though – and the next canonical sequel, *KOF '97*, is the culmination of the Orochi storyline, and features a slightly altered power meter (which combines the Advanced and Extra modes from *'94/'95* and *'96* respectively) and introduces some new characters, most notably Blue Mary and Billy Kane from *Fatal Fury*, and Orochi-powered fruit-loop Yamazaki. Not deviating much from *'96*, *'97* is perhaps one of the lesser played titles in the series – coming as it does sandwiched in between the brand new engine of *'96* and the series' high point of *'98*. As such, it is now reasonably rare – particularly in MVS cartridge form, despite the usual conversions to PlayStation and Saturn, and even to SNK's own Neo Geo Pocket handheld, renamed *The King Of Fighters R-1*.

More than eight years on, general popular opinion decrees that *The King Of Fighters 1998 – The Slugfest/Dream Match Never Ends*, is the highlight of the series, and one of the best 2D fighting games of all time. Indeed, playing this game today, it still looks, sounds, and plays incredibly. "Yes" says Kadowaki knowingly. "We used to hear many fans say that *The King Of Fighters '98* was one of the best 2D fighting games on the market. We also heard this from our development teams." Why is this the case though? What special ingredient makes *'98* such a palatable dish? "We trust that this is because *'98* has well adjusted features that compare favourably with other 2D fighting titles of the time," Kadowaki continues. "For fighting game fans, the balance of the game, character design and effects are very important features. *KOF '98* came complete with all these features, and many more." And while it may sound like Kadowaki is getting a bit 'Billy Big-Biscuits' on us, he is right; *'98* is a real beauty, a non-storyline 'Dream Match' that breaks free from any Orochi shenanigans and unites nearly all of the participants from the previous four games in a glorious fighting extravaganza. Everything about it feels so right, and it rightly takes pride of place in the game collections of fight fans all over the world. An excellent Dreamcast conversion, curiously titled *Dream Match '99* – presumably to coincide with the year it was released – saw the light of day in the United States and Japan, featuring a stunning animated introduction sequence, spiffing pseudo-three-dimensional backgrounds (a precursor to the style revisited in *'94 Re-Bout*), and the ability to link your console to a Neo Geo Pocket Color, which was home to the excellent super-deformed *The King Of Fighters R-2*, unlocking some winsome extras.

Any chance of the *Re-Bout* treatment, guys? "*KOF '98 Re-Bout* is definitely a realistic project as it is one of the most popular titles in the franchise," Kadowaki informs us tantalisingly. Here's hoping.

The King Of Fighters '99 saw a shift back into storyline territory, this time with the curiously named NESTS saga, which turns out to be even more complicated that the whole Orochi mess. The identikit enigmatic young protagonist in this case is K' ("FIGHTING STYLE: PURE VIOLENCE

"WE USED TO HEAR MANY FANS SAY THAT THE KING OF FIGHTERS '98 WAS ONE OF THE BEST 2D FIGHTING GAMES ON THE MARKET. FOR FIGHTING GAME FANS, THE BALANCE OF THE GAME, CHARACTER DESIGN AND EFFECTS ARE VERY IMPORTANT FEATURES" AKIHITO KADOWAKI



» *KOF* on your moby, innit! More importantly though: Badger Bash.



» Some *KOF* diehards dress up badly, yesterday. Or is it New Kids On The Block?



» Lucky can hurt you with that basketball in more ways than you can possibly imagine.



» 1979 Geese lays it down on Tegs, Neowave-stylee.



» It all looks ace from the box – but unless tyou understand Japanese you are screwed.



» Saturn fans in Nippon got this little boxed beauty.

AND USE OF EXPLOSIVE POWERS!") – a fellow who has been injected with Kyo Kusanagi's DNA, giving him the same kick-ass flaming powers (we would love to see Jeremy Kyle tackle that one). The story revolves around former NESTS agent K' and his confrontations with the sinister cartel, the Ikari warriors (who at one stage are attempting to hunt him down), some evil dude called Zero (who is trying to activate the horrifying Zero Cannon, and, like, destroy the world), a traitor called Ron, and various other peeps that have been cloned from the Kusanagi bloodline – including K's new buddy Kula Diamond, an ice-powered stone-cold bitch who was initially sent to do battle with him. The whole thing culminates in a dust up with arch nasty man Igniz, and the eradication of the NESTS gang.

But of course what we are really concerned with is the quality of the games. And to be fair, *'99* itself is excellent, with four bods on each team, incorporating the aforementioned 'Striker' system that would become part of the next few instalments. The system allowed an extra character to be selected as your "striker", meaning a button combo would summon them into the fray in real-time during fights, to inflict damage on your opponent. The strikers vary from "active strikers" in *'99* which are selected from the selectable character roster, to the "another strikers" selectable in *KOF 2000* – a gang of non-playable fighters who are only available as strikers. *2000* also featured hidden "maniac strikers" that were drawn from other SNK games, and on home versions are



» Playmore give good fan service in the form of some Orochi compo joy.



» They were typical brothers, always scrapping....



FISTS OF FLAME





» *Maximum Impact* took the series to 3D, meaning even more gratuitous Mai shots.



» The sublime 98 Neo CD art. Peruse it whilst you wait for it to bloody load.

'YOU CAN LOOK FORWARD TO MORE ARCADE AND CONSUMER 2D TITLES FROM SNK PLAYMORE IN THE FUTURE AND WE DEFINITELY WANT TO CONTINUE TO EVOLVE THE KOF SERIES FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE" AKIHITO KADOWAKI



» Falcoon rocks the mic.

unlocked by inputting a code or fulfilling certain conditions in the survival mode. '*99* and *2000* arrived on the Game Boy Advance in the form of *The King Of Fighters EX: Neo Blood* and *Howling Blood* respectively, and while they looked exceptional considering the power available to the platform, they suffered with crap D-pad control syndrome, and bizarrely easy gameplay.

Fans are split on the whole strikers thing. Some think it enhances the gameplay, whereas others feel it is gimmicky and lends the games an unbalanced feel. Regardless of this, they were continued until the 2001 release, although sadly by this stage SNK had gone bust, meaning *The King Of Fighters 2000* was the last title developed by the 'original' SNK. Development duties were then handed across to Korean developer Eolith, who created two *KOF* efforts, for better or worse. *2001* is very much the Marmite of *KOF*, a strikers-fest that means you can select up to three strikers and only one actual playable fighter, featuring radically redesigned front-end and character profiles on the select screen. Many swear by it, whereas others feel the gameplay is diluted by the amount of striking options and lack of traditional team play.

Perhaps listening to some of the criticisms levelled at 2001, Eolith went back to basics for the next title, the "Dream Match" of *KOF 2002: Challenge*



» Terry's classic Power Geyser from 2002.



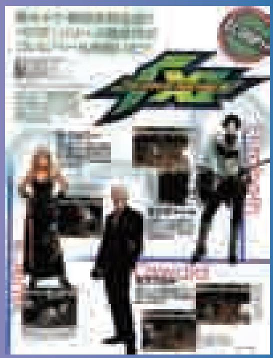
» Iori was deeply critical of the bullying in *Celebrity BB*.



» The *Re-Bout* package was sublime, and not just graphically either.



» *Another Day* brings *KOF* to life on the movie screen.



» The new faces from *XI* in all their glory.

To The Ultimate Battle. Returning to the 3-on-3 teams and featuring gameplay far more similar to the golden *'96-'98* period, it was a favourite among fans, particularly for tournament play. It was also the last title Eolith worked upon, handing duties across to the newly created SNK Playmore for *KOF 2003*.

The tenth *KOF*, *'03* was the last to be made with Neo Geo MVS hardware, and in many ways was a fitting swansong for the long lasting arcade board – it begins a new storyline, revolving around – you guessed it – an enigmatic protagonist (the bizarre looking Ash Crimson) and a plot to re-awaken the Orochi. Gone were the strikers, and in came the 'multi shift' system – real-time tagging that feels like a more balanced version of the madness present in *Marvel Vs Capcom*. SNK Playmore then changed up to the Sammy Atomiswave hardware, testing the water initially with 2004's *The King Of Fighters: Neowave* – a graphically sound re-imagining of *KOF 2002*, with no canonical storyline and a cool looking young version of Geese Howard to beat up at the end. The real time tagging was expanded upon for the most recent sequel, 2005's *The King Of Fighters XI*, the second and last for the Atomiswave board, prior to a move onto Taito F-3 at some point during 2007, whereby presumably the Ash Crimson saga will be completed.

So we are sort of up to the present day – and such is the trend for graphical wizardry, it was inevitable that at some point, *KOF* may go 3D. And it did, with 2004's *KOF: Maximum Impact* and the 2006 sequel *Maximum Impact 2*. With character design from the legendary Falcoon, the first game, developed by Playmore subsidiary Noise Factory should definitely be given a chance, even if it does have the cheapest, most difficult boss character ever, even given the fact that SNK are synonymous with cheap bosses, even having a recognised term to describe them ('SNK boss syndrome'!). Falcoon took over the whole show for the sequel. We asked Kadowaki whether this could herald the end of 2D fighting from SNK, or does Falcoon have other ideas? "Falcoon has a variety of talents not only in character design; he has a very deep knowledge of fighting games, so the development teams always do a good job under his direction. We just released his first produced fighting game – *KOF: MI2* in Japan where it is receiving great acclaim and feedback from the users. We would hope to continuously develop and release 2D games for many platforms. You can look forward to more arcade and consumer 2D titles from SNK Playmore in the future and we definitely want to continue to evolve the *KOF* series for as long as possible".

Amen to that.

Not only did the series go 3D, it also went, erm, TV. 2005 saw the arrival of *The King Of Fighters: Another Day* animated series, and whilst clearly a promotional tool for *Maximum Impact 2* and *KOF XI*, (the storyline does not sit with that of the actual games themselves) it was still well received and we hope for a UK release. Playmore don't disappoint in this respect: "Since the announcement of the *KOF* anime series in Japan, we received many requests from overseas customers. In order to meet demand from our overseas fans, we've voiced over all the characters' speech into English. We hope to release *The King Of Fighters: Another Day* as a special bonus item for PS2 *KOF: MI2* in Europe," confirms Kadowaki.

We hope that the current trend for releasing older Neo Geo games for current formats will continue too, such as the *Garou Densetsu*/*Fatal Fury*, *Art Of Fighting* and *Orochi*/*Nests KOF* packs for PS2, all of which saw the light of day in Japan, and of course the *Metal Slug* series that are available for budget price on the PS2, and in the forthcoming compilation for the PSP and Wii. Virtual Console and Xbox Live are also ideal platforms for some old-skool *KOF*, no? "We've developed more than 100 Neo Geo titles. We would hope to release ports of the older titles on a variety of platforms for the overseas," continues Kadowaki. "We have not decided which platform or formats yet, but lots of older titles will be available in the near future, so watch this space! Fighting games are naturally more entertaining when played against human opposition, so we are considering increasing the opportunity to enable online play for our titles on formats like Xbox Live Arcade. We'll first test some of our classic titles in Japan and then branch out to the rest of the world from there." This is clearly excellent news, and one day we may be able to shout obscenities at Americans whilst enjoying a game of *KOF '98*.

It is extremely difficult to truly do such a complex and lengthy series justice in a few mere paragraphs of text, and indeed our own Stuart Campbell could probably dedicate two or three issues to the cause if he wanted to get *KOF*-Definitive on our ass. Rather than being exclusive to SNK hardware, *The King Of Fighters* is readily available to all gamers, often at a budget price, whether you own a PS2, an Xbox or a Dreamcast. Such is the all-conquering nature of the franchise; it can also be bought for the ill-fated N-Gage. Hell, even the AES homecarts are coming down in price these days, meaning you can enjoy the games how nature originally intended. And we would urge that you do so. A true Japanese gaming icon, the series is rightfully considered to be in the premier league of 2D brawlers, and continues to represent a sadly dying genre. Thank the heavens that SNK Playmore seems intent on keeping the tradition alive, and long may it do so.



» They may kick ass, but they also know how to party.

FORGOTTEN WORLDS

NOW WHERE DID I PUT THAT WORLD?



- » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £60+ (PCB BOARD)



HISTORY

We've never liked Sinitta. Watching her prance around in the mid-Eighties with all the grace of a neutered hippo while warbling pathetically poor pop songs like Toy Boy and Cross My Broken Heart has never been our idea of fun and unlike a fine bottle of wine she's definitely not aged gracefully over time.

Admittedly, not necessarily the best way to start a piece on Capcom's rock-hard shooter, but as soon as we started playing and witnessed huge, muscled men in tight jeans with large weapons under their arms, Sinitta's So Macho instantly leapt into our heads, and like a needy girlfriend, has refused to let go ever since.

Anyway, back to *Forgotten Worlds*, and as you may have already guessed from this tantalising screenshot on the right, it's a big, bold, brash shooter that stars the sort of muscle-bound heroes that wouldn't have looked out of place in an Arnie flick. All in all, it's very, very Eighties. I mean they're constantly wearing sunglasses – even in deep space for goodness sakes!

Still, for those unaware of *Forgotten Worlds*' arcade pedigree, rest assured that it's very good, albeit extremely tough. The third part of Capcom's '*Jet-Pack Hero*' trilogy – *Section Z* and *Side Arms Hyper Dyne* completing the triumvirate – *Forgotten Worlds* essentially had you playing a butch space marine and blowing seven shades of shinola out of anything foolish enough to stray into your soldier's flight path whilst collecting blue Zenny coins to spend in the weapons shop that would occasionally pop up on each level. Famous for its spectacular mayors, over-the-top weaponry and difficult to master control system – a dial controls where you fire your weapon – *Forgotten Worlds* is one of the best blasters around and remains an incredibly insane experience. Crying out for a re-release on Xbox Live Arcade, although a Mega Drive conversion on the Virtual Console would be just as nice as it was arguably the best port, Capcom's intense blaster remains an insanely polished shooter – just don't start thinking of Sinitta.





Before They Were Famous

WE RELISH THE CHANCE TO MAKE INDUSTRY CELEBS CRINGE WITH EMBARRASSMENT. AFTER THE LAST BEFORE THEY WERE FAMOUS, THERE WERE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS THAT WILL WRIGHT GOT HOLD OF AN ISSUE AND PROMPTLY RAN FROM A MANHATTAN HOTEL IN NOTHING BUT FLOWING BATHROBES, SCREAMING "WHERE THE HELL DID YOU GET THAT PHOTO OF ME, YOU BASTARDS?!" (THAT THIS RESULTED IN HIS ARREST IS PURELY SPECULATION.) JOHN SZCZEPANIAK AGAIN DIGS UP THE PAST, INTENT ON EMBARRASSING AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE, AND MAKING THEM RUN SCREAMING FROM HOTELS



EARLY GAMES:
Girl's Garden

CLAIM TO FAME:
Sonic The Hedgehog





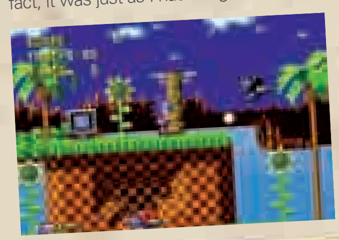
YUJI NAKA

Yuji Naka learned programming by typing up magazine listings for games. Upon finding errors, he would try to correct them himself and soon began studying Assembler in his free time. "A lot of people draw cartoons in their notebooks during classes, but I was writing code." Later, joining Sega, his very first game was a rather odd title called *Girl's Garden* for the precursor to the Master System. "One of my colleagues and I made it as part of our so-called rookie training. We were trying to find out the limits of expression on the SG-1000. However, all of a sudden, our boss decided to put it on the market so we had to finish it. The game was kind of cute, in which a girl named Papuri had to pick flowers and bring them to this boy named Mint. I wanted girls to play this game."

On how he sees it now, Naka spoke fondly of his first creation. "I feel that a lot of things were considered thoroughly, and the concept in itself is pretty organised for my first game. Though I say it myself, I think it was a pretty good game. We were also fortunate that they turned our ideas into a product." Actually playing it, *Girl's Garden* comes across almost as a bizarre and jerky *Pac-Man* clone, with flowers replacing the pellets, two bears replacing the ghosts, and blue pots of honey as pseudo power pills.

CLAIM TO FAME

Although he worked on other titles, it was the ball-of-blue-spikes that propelled him to international fame. Evaluating it now, Naka admits to being a little biased: "It's a game that has a special place in my heart, so I can't really find any flaws in it. I filled the game with the last drop of my idea, so I was pretty confident about it. I mean, I had this confidence that it would sell well both in the US and in Europe. In fact, it was just as I had imagined."

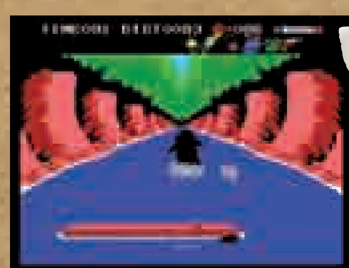




EARLY GAMES:
Penguin Adventure (MSX)

CLAIM TO FAME:
Metal Gear series





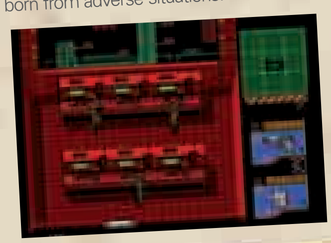
HIDEO KOJIMA

Kojima dreamed of making films, but got into games because he thought they could better satisfy him. He wasn't happy in the early days: "It was really disappointing because they assigned me to the MSX division. I had joined a company in the game industry, wanting to make Famicom or arcade games, and then I was assigned to MSX. Back then MSX had only 16 colours, and on top of that, if you excluded all the colours that were hard to use, such as pink or purple, you were left with only eight colours. I was desperate, wondering how on earth I could make games with that." Regardless, his first game, *Penguin Adventure*, is still hailed as one of the best action titles on the system. It's vastly superior to the prequel: some holes in the floor contain secret shops, there's a tremendous amount of variety between levels, and there are even bosses. It is a truly excellent title that few seem to discuss.

Despite the praise of his early games, Kojima isn't fond of his older work or the zealous passion of retro fans. He says: "What I like about making games is that they don't survive. You can't play old games as game machines are constantly changing. The Japanese proverb that says 'you discard your shame when you travel' is what games are to me. Games should remain in people's minds and in history. That means that people forget about the games we make, which is good."

CLAIM TO FAME

"The company asked me to create a combat game. Actually, a senior associate had been in charge of it but he was stuck and I was asked to do it. You could not have more than four bullets with MSX, and that meant you could only have two to three enemies. You cannot make a combat game with that. So I came up with a game like *The Great Escape* where the prisoner had to escape. It was an idea born from adverse situations."





EARLY GAMES:
Game Freak (self-published fanzine), Quinty (aka: Mendel Palace)

CLAIM TO FAME:
Pocket Monsters





SATOSHI TAJIRI

Tajiri wrote for fanzine *Game Freak* before turning to home-brew development. "It became possible to see what was going on inside the Famicom when software for beginners called Family BASIC was released. When I understood its mechanism, I went to Akihabara to buy a multi-use circuit board, added the terminals from my Famicom, and ran my programs over it. That was our first step." *Quinty* was published three years later.

Now he says: "It was punk. At that time Famicom games had restrictions based on hardware. I just wanted to go against the flow of time, and it was also a very stoic manner of trying to show them the kind of games we thought were fun." He says most games only had two frames of animation: "I couldn't forgive this type of animation that looked like a cheap picture-story." His focus was on quality movements rather than flashy colours. "There weren't games with such a concept. That is why I say it was punk." The game is hugely fun even when emulated today, and Tajiri was right, the animation is painstakingly fluid.

CLAIM TO FAME

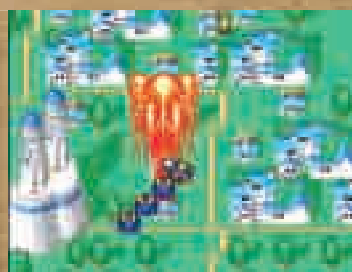
Pokémon. He wanted to release *Quinty* in America but it was rejected for being too cute (despite later being published by Namco as *Mendel Palace*). "I started to ask myself what I really wanted to make. That became the roots of *Pokémon*. Thinking about 'who I was' brought me back [to my youth]. I wanted to create a game with all my memories, and that was the birth of *Pokémon*."





EARLY GAMES: *Detana!! Twinbee, Tokimeki Memorial*

CLAIM TO FAME: *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*





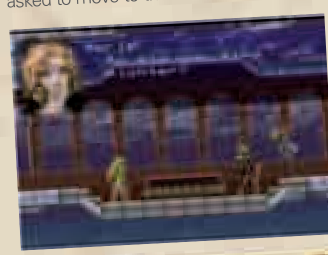
KOJI IGARASHI

Igarashi, or IGA, plays by his own rules. He told Gamasutra, "I joined Konami right after I graduated from college. I was going to enter a different company, but at the last minute I had a quarrel with the human resources department, and was fired before I even began. But I had a mentor at Konami, who really thought I should work there. I passed their application exam but I didn't have enough university credits to work there full-time so I had to stay on for another year of school, working at Konami in a part-time capacity. After that, I became a full-time Konami employee. This was in the year Heisei 2, or 1990."

His first project was never completed, "I entered Konami as a programmer, and worked on a simulation game under the education software department, that was never released. My first real product that came to market was *Detana!! Twinbee* for the PC Engine." He later also worked on the successful *Tokimeki Memorial*. There's no direct correlation between these and his famous works, but everyone starts somewhere (did you know, Jackie Chan starred in a softcore porno film?). IGA speaks nostalgically of these early days, saying to Next-Gen.biz: "Back in the good old days, we had smaller teams making games, so it was far less complex."

CLAIM TO FAME

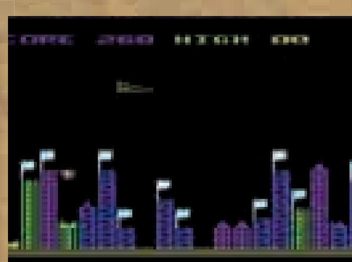
Symphony Of The Night is arguably IGA's greatest achievement. "*Castlevania* was a series I enjoyed before I started at Konami, so I'm really gratified that this series has been entrusted to me. As for how I took over the project: I was working on *Tokimeki Memorial*, and told my boss that I wouldn't work on a sequel. Because the game was selling well at the time, my boss accepted my request for transfer. I asked to move to the *Castlevania* team."

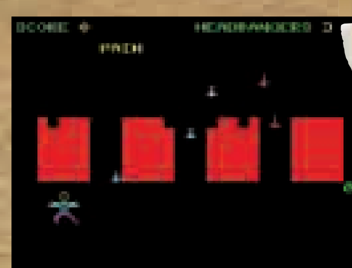




EARLY GAMES: *Bomb Buenos Aires, Rox, Headbanger's Heaven, Andes Attack*

CLAIM TO FAME: *Attack Of The Mutant Camels*





YAK

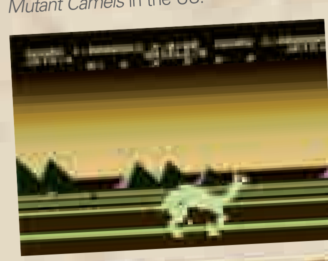
Even before he was famous, the Yak courted controversy. His account, on Llamasoft.com, is very revealing. "If we were to call ourselves Llamasoft, we actually needed some software to sell, and so during the summer of 1982 I busied myself with the creation of what were to be the first Llamasoft games for the Vic-20. One of them was a simple 3D maze game, with redefined characters that put bricks on the maze walls along with occasional Pink Floyd hammers and the Llamasoft logo. Another was probably the most shameful thing in Llamasoft history, a joke that got out of hand."

This was a clone of *City Bomber*, though as the Yak reveals, it was no ordinary clone. "At the time, there was conflict between Argentina and Britain over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands and… just for a joke, you see… I created a little graphic of a waving Argentinean flag and stuck that on top of the buildings in my city. And made the Vic play *Rule Britannia* when the plane landed successfully. And called the game *Bomb Buenos Aires*. It was all done in what was intended as a tongue-in-cheek manner. I thought that it might get us noticed – in a tasteless kind of a way – and indeed it did."

The Daily Telegraph asked who wanted to release "thousands of tons of bombs on Buenos Aires." The Press Complaints Commission stepped in, and Llamasoft issued an apology and changed the title.

CLAIM TO FAME

Some may have expected to see *Tempest 2000* here, but the Yakmeister achieved fame early in his career. *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* was an interesting shmup in which you had to obliterate endless waves of giant, attacking mutant camels. For our American readers, it's worth noting that the *Gridrunner* sequel, called *Matrix*, was for some reason renamed *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* in the US.



Before They Were Famous



EARLY GAMES: *Address Book, Star Trek hack, fortune-telling program, Tennis Game, Portopia Renzoku Satsujin Jiken*

CLAIM TO FAME: *Dragon Quest series*





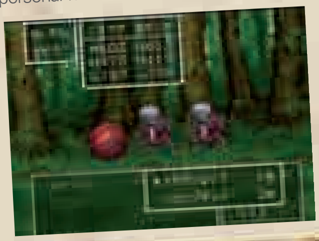
YUJI HORII

Asking about Horii's first proper game reveals he created Japan's earliest adventure/RPG-style title. "I read an article in a PC magazine about a US genre called 'adventure games', which allowed players to read stories on their PCs. We still didn't have them in Japan, and I took it upon myself to make one. That was how *Portopia Renzoku Satsujin Jiken* came about. It was a program in which the story would develop through entering a command and by receiving an answer to it. It was exciting for me to imagine the reactions of the players playing with it." It's been described by the Japanese press as "a game without game over", since there was technically no way to lose.

Starting on the PC-88 it was ported to multiple systems, including MSX and Famicom, but never made it out of Japan. Thanks to ROM-hacking group DvD Translations, the Famicom version can now be patched and enjoyed in English. Although simple, it shows its skill in the pacing, general flow of the investigation, and the writing (based on the fan translation, which is reportedly accurate).

CLAIM TO FAME

Portopia's console success led Horii to create *Dragon Quest*, which influenced Square and thereby the entire industry. So, having been involved with all the *Dragon Quest* games, which is his favourite? "It's a tough question; I have a special feeling for each of them. You had to shift between reality and dreams in *VI* – although some thought that the story was confusing, this is actually my personal favourite."





EARLY GAMES: *Super Billiards, Roller Ball, Hole In One Professional, Space Defence Force, Arcana*

CLAIM TO FAME: *Nintendo presidency, Wii launch*





SATORU IWATA

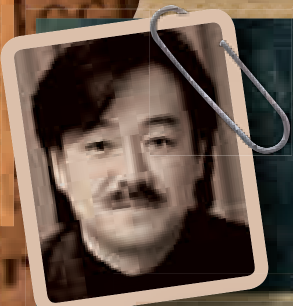
Satoru Iwata, the current president of Nintendo, started off as a game programmer – even doing it freelance during university for HAL Laboratories. After graduating, he was hired full-time by HAL. A quick check shows that he's credited in several games as co-creator or programmer, like *Super Billiards* and *Hole In One Professional*, while for others like *Roller Ball, Space Defence Force* (NES), and *Arcana* (SNES) he's listed only as a technical advisor. Regardless, his direct contribution is without question.

It's interesting to note that despite his senior managerial position, he's actually a skilled and competent coder – it's in stark contrast to other companies where senior people were trained in business practices while having no understanding of the game creation process. He became president of HAL Laboratories in 1993, after which he was obviously credited in every title the company made. He continued to directly work on several games – notably the *Kirby* series which he helped envision. Even today Iwata is said to aid in the creation of new *Kirby* titles

CLAIM TO FAME

It's difficult to pinpoint precisely what Iwata's claim to fame should be since he's always had a presence. However, there's no denying the gravitas of his appointment as president of Nintendo in 2002 – the first to take up the role without being related to a Yamauchi through blood or marriage. And of course he then ushered in the Wii console. From humble origins, Satoru Iwata gradually rose to great power.





EARLY GAMES: *Co-founded Square, 3D WorldRunner, Rad Racer, JJ*

CLAIM TO FAME: *Final Fantasy series*





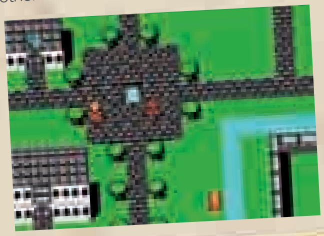
HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI

The original Square was co-founded by Sakaguchi in September 1983, along with Masafumi Miyamoto, though it wouldn't become independent of parent company Denyuusha until 1986. In its early days, Square developed a lot of garbage such as *Genesis: Beyond The Revelation* and *Cruise Chaser Blassty* on NEC PC-88. The company even developed hentai. Googling for Square's PC-88 title *Alpha* during office hours is not recommended.

Sakaguchi was responsible for some of the firm's better titles. Three of his earliest games include *3D WorldRunner, Rad Racer* and *JJ* – all for NES. Although not noticeable from these screenshots, *WorldRunner* and *JJ* are highly impressive 3D NES titles that mimic *Space Harrier*. They were also compatible with the system's 3D goggles. *Rad Racer* was developed between these two, and for the time was a good racer again compatible with the goggles. *Rad Racer* was also made famous by the Nintendo World Championship, and the Fred Savage film *The Wizard*, where it was controlled by The Power Glove. Who knew at the time that the man behind these would take over the RPG world?

CLAIM TO FAME

Regarding Japanese RPGs, Sakaguchi is second only to Yuji Horii. Although the creator of *Final Fantasy* was less involved after *VI*, there's no denying that the series exists because of Sakaguchi. He told *Famitsu*: "In the beginning, I was the main planner, but when the production team increased, a director was needed so I took that role as well. Basically, I was responsible for the story and events, in other words the tale up to *FFVI*."





EARLY GAMES: *Capcom Quiz Hatena's Adventure, Who Framed Roger Rabbit?, Goof Troop, Aladdin*

CLAIM TO FAME: *Resi Evil, DMC, Phoenix Wright*





SHINJI MIKAMI

The history of Shinji Mikami is best accounted by the man himself in the book *Another Side Of Biohazard*. Roughly translated, he said on his days before *RE:* "After I started work in Capcom, I made a game for the Game Boy, a quiz-adventure. My boss told me to 'Make it in one month' but it took about three months to finish.

My second game, *Roger Rabbit*, only sold overseas so I didn't get much respect within Capcom because the game didn't sell in Japan. I had to create everything by myself. It took five months.

Next was a Formula One game. I really love racing so I was excited to make it, but it got cancelled about eight months later. That was my mistake: I wanted quality. I put a lot of pressure on the staff, who said 'We can't do it any more.' I said 'If you can't do this I'll cancel the whole project', and it really got cancelled. I paid for that mistake; my next job was a port from an arcade game and I had only three months to do it because I had to finish quickly in order for the company to get its money back.

Afterwards it was Disney again, with *Goof Troop*. After *Goofy* was *Aladdin*, another Disney game. I made three Disney games and then finally *Resident Evil*. I think I appreciate Disney because my frustration gathered to create *Resident Evil*."

CLAIM TO FAME

"Mr Fujiwara called me one day and told me to make a horror game. And he wanted to use the system from the game *Sweet Home*. He told me to create 'something worth seeing.' When he said that, I thought 'finally, my moment has come.' In *RE*, even though the game system is the same as *Sweet Home*, there are few similarities, but I got a lot of ideas from it. *Sweet Home* didn't sell well, but I still think that game was the masterpiece."

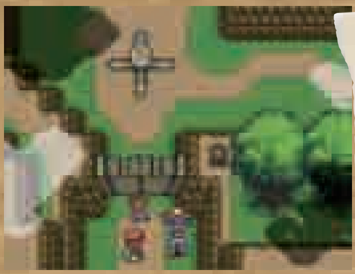




EARLY GAMES: *Automaton puppets (not a game), Mario Open Golf, Marvelous: Mouhitotsu no Takarajima*

CLAIM TO FAME: *Zelda series from Ocarina Of Time*





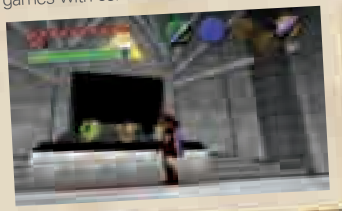
EIJI AONUMA

Aonuma on his early years: "I had a chance interview with Nintendo. I'd played arcade games on occasion so knew what videogames were. I went to the interview where I met with Shigeru Miyamoto. I showed him the automatons I'd created for my graduate work and got the job. Long after I joined Nintendo, I found out Miyamoto is a huge fan of puppetry."

"In the beginning, I did graphic design, drawing dot-pictures for sprite-based games. I discovered that all the art I created over my first year – I drew the characters for *Mario Open Golf* on Famicom – finally went into a small stone-like thing: a cartridge ROM. I've always been very sensitive to the tactile sense in my creative world, so that was a culture shock for me. But I continued at Nintendo, deciding to give myself time to experience game development. Luckily, I was put in charge of directing the development of *Marvelous*, a SNES game released in Japan, which turned out to be a great experience." He believes it was Marvelous that led to his move to the *Zelda* team. "Perhaps Mr Miyamoto thought that my vision – creating a multiplicity of small things to create an enormous thing, which I'd done during *Marvelous* – would be a perfect fit for *Zelda*."

CLAIM TO FAME

He started with *Ocarina Of Time* which is still his favourite. "I think that *Ocarina Of Time* was the most impressive title for me. My favourite bit was probably the Water Shrine. I love diving in the sea, and I thought I put plenty of diving puzzles in it. This made it a bit more difficult than most of the game, but it's the bit that remains strongly in my mind." And Aonuma's views on his cel-shaded version of Link? "I like Link in that shape and I have no desire to stop producing games with cel-shaded Link."

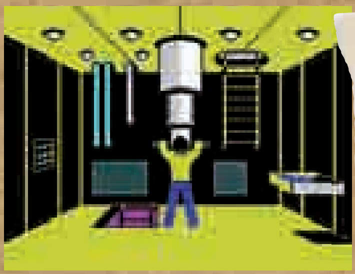




EARLY GAMES: *Spitfire Ace, Solo Flight, Silent Service, Crusade In Europe,*

CLAIM TO FAME: *Sid Meier's Pirates!*





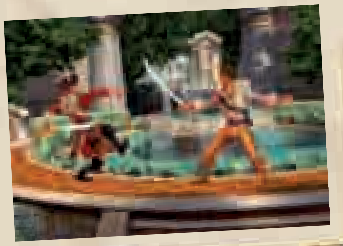
SID MEIER

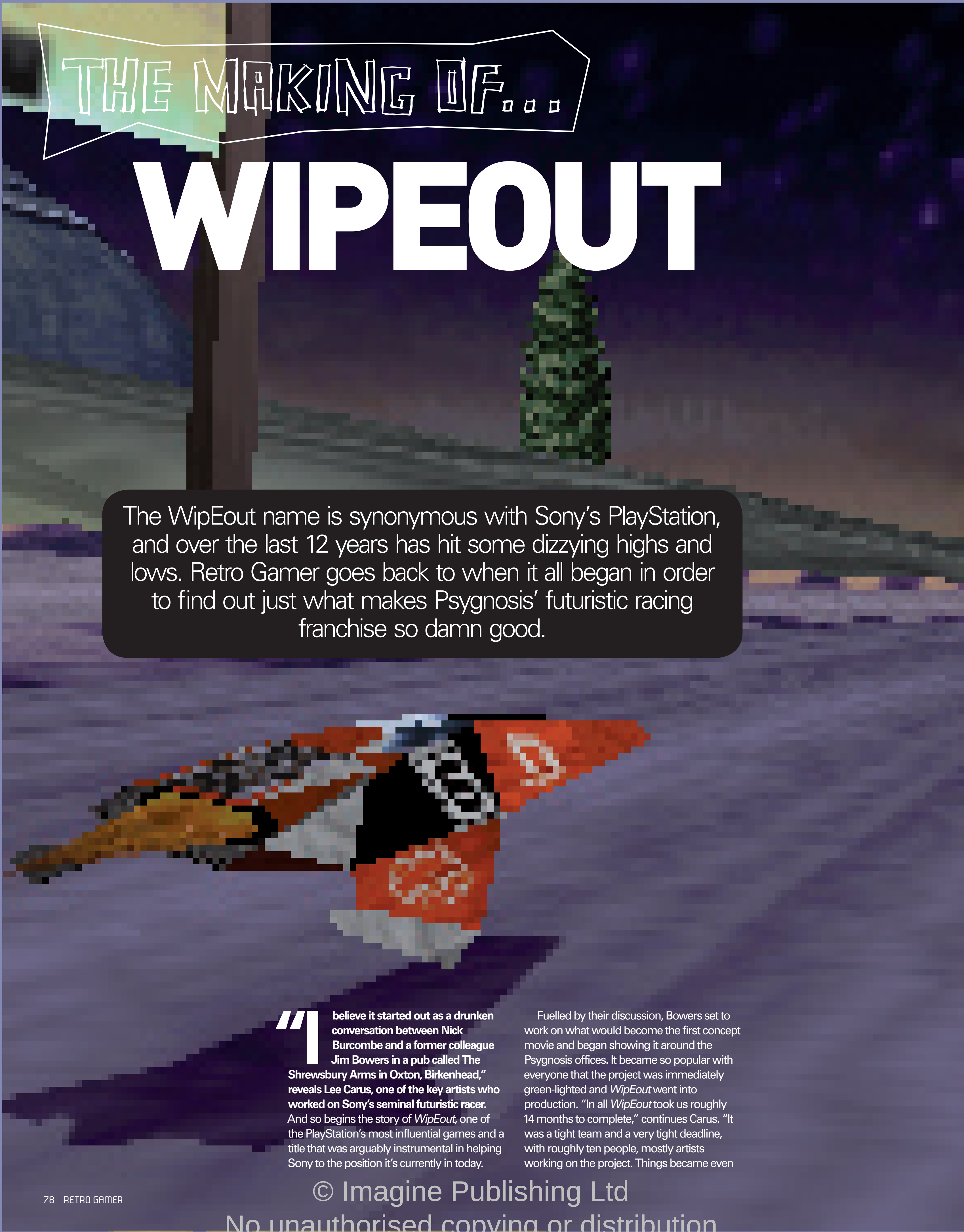
Meier began his career around 1982, and started off mainly creating flight-sims like *Spitfire Ace* and *F15 Strike Eagle*, before moving onto strategic military war games. He's spoken openly in past interviews regarding these early days, "It was still a time when a couple of guys in a basement could duplicate their own disks, put them in plastic baggies with a four-page photocopied manual, and actually sell a product like that. It was a great learning experience. I think a lot of what makes me kind of able to keep doing games is the fact that I was there at the beginning and that I don't have to play catch-up all the time. It's kind of like I've been there since the start, so I've seen the evolution and have a bit of a sense of history and perspective."

He also spoke about MicroPose, the company he co-founded with Bill Stealy: "We started off with, basically, me writing the games, and I had a couple of my friends doing conversions – we all had day jobs; this was kind of our hobby." While he was undeniably successful during his early years, building a strong reputation within the industry with several games being highly acclaimed, it can be argued that he only truly became famous once his name started appearing in titles.

CLAIM TO FAME

Meier explains *Pirates!*: "It was basically my reaction to the adventure/RPG games that I'd played. […] I thought 'this is the way I'd like to see an adventure game done.' Forget the points, the mathematics – just have an adventure. Go do things and wander around this world." *Pirates!* was ported and updated for multiple computers and consoles, later being redone for PC, Xbox and PSP. We used an image from the update, but it's our mag so deal with it.





THE MAKING OF...

WIPEOUT

The WipEout name is synonymous with Sony's PlayStation, and over the last 12 years has hit some dizzying highs and lows. Retro Gamer goes back to when it all began in order to find out just what makes Psygnosis' futuristic racing franchise so damn good.

"I believe it started out as a drunken conversation between Nick Burcombe and a former colleague Jim Bowers in a pub called The Shrewsbury Arms in Oxton, Birkenhead," reveals Lee Carus, one of the key artists who worked on Sony's seminal futuristic racer. And so begins the story of *WipEout*, one of the PlayStation's most influential games and a title that was arguably instrumental in helping Sony to the position it's currently in today.

Fuelled by their discussion, Bowers set to work on what would become the first concept movie and began showing it around the Psygnosis offices. It became so popular with everyone that the project was immediately green-lighted and *WipEout* went into production. "In all *WipEout* took us roughly 14 months to complete," continues Carus. "It was a tight team and a very tight deadline, with roughly ten people, mostly artists working on the project. Things became even

"THE BILLBOARDS WERE ORIGINALLY PUT IN PLACE TO HIDE CIRCUIT VISIBILITY ISSUES. IT CERTAINLY WASN'T A CREATIVE DECISION, IT WAS A TECHNICAL DESIGN ISSUE" LEE CARUS



» There are some huge jumps in *WipEout*. Luckily, your craft is more than able to deal with them.



» An example of the tongue-in-cheek advertisements that littered the edges of *WipEout*'s tracks.

tighter when we had to re-write the code some three-quarters of the way through development." Even though practically re-writing a game seems unthinkable in this day and age of astronomical budgets, Carus and the rest of the team were always confident of the title they were working on, and even doubts from Sony's head wouldn't convince them otherwise.

"We were self motivated, so pressure was applied from within, even though back then the concept of AAA titles didn't really exist," explains Carus. "One amusing point which added to our determination to get this game out to such a high quality was when the then head of the studio showed Ken Kutaragi how *WipEout* was progressing, only for him to say that we'd never get it completed in time – that was great motivation for us to prove we could!"

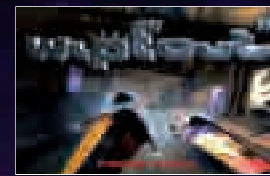
Kutaragi may not have been convinced, but the *WipEout* boys knew differently; after all, the *WipEout* concept had been gnawing away at the back of their minds for a good four years before work had ever started on the project. It just took that initial drunken talk to get everything kick-started… "The original look for *WipEout* has been kicking around for some time," confirms Carus. "In fact, people with a keen eye for retro games will actually spot a *WipEout* ship on the intro sequence for the Amiga game *Matrix Marauders*."

Of course, *Matrix Marauders* wasn't the only Amiga title that *WipEout* was said to have drawn inspiration from, and anyone who has ever played Michael Powell's *Powerdrome* would no doubt assume (as we initially did) that the 1989 racer was the original catalyst for *WipEout*'s eventual conception. As the lead designer, Nick Burcombe, points outs though, while the Electronic Arts-published racer did feature in *WipEout*'s design, it wasn't in the way that many people would have no doubt thought. "From a gameplay point of view *Powerdrome* was an example of how NOT to do it as far as I was concerned," begins Burcombe. "If you thought *WipEout* had tricky handling then you clearly hadn't played a lot of *Powerdrome*. *WipEout* was much more influenced by *Super Mario Kart* than any other game."

It's a revelation that begins to make perfect sense when you consider the various different weapons that your craft gains access to throughout each race, a mechanic straight out of the classic 16-bit racer and one that was instrumental to *WipEout*'s core gameplay. "All the weapons had one simple function – 'Slow the Opponents down'," reveals Burcombe. "Some weapons slow people down behind you (mines), some slowed opponents ahead of you, while the Turbo Boost basically equates to slowing

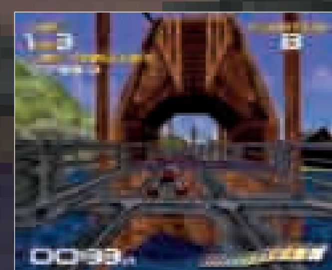


IN THE KNOW

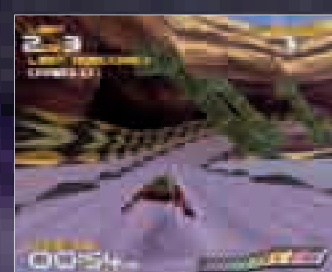


» **PUBLISHER:** SCEE
» **DEVELOPER:** PSYGNOSIS
» **RELEASED:** 1995
» **GENRE:** FUTURISTIC RACER
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5

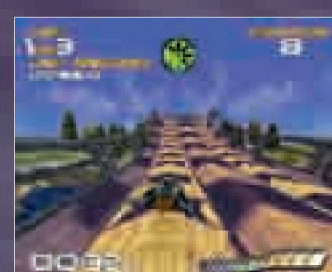




» Some of the track design is beautiful.



» Stay away from the walls - they'll stop you dead.



» Although there were less than ten different tracks they all featured excellent design.

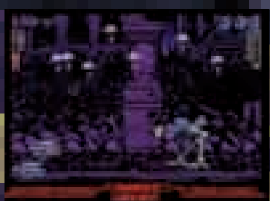
WIPEOUT

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SHADOW OF THE BEAST
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS 8 AND 16-BIT FORMATS
YEAR: 1989

WALKER
SYSTEMS: AMIGA
YEAR: 1991

DISCWORLD
SYSTEMS: PLAYSTATION, PC, SATURN
YEAR: 1995





» The first-person perspective gave you an amazing sense of speed. Only when you were actually moving of course…

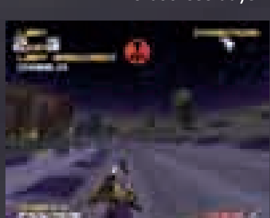




» It wouldn't be long before the Psygnosis logo vanished forever.

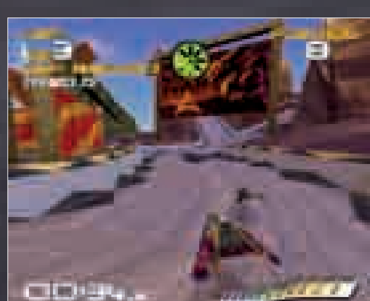
"IT'S ALL IN THE REFLEXES…"

Despite being critically praised by practically every magazine that reviewed it, *WipEout* wasn't without its faults. The biggest issue with reviewers seemed to be the somewhat iffy collision-detection and that hitting the sides of the track would cause you to stop dead (allowing you to be easily overtaken). Burcombe was aware of the issue but felt that the fans were prepared to go the extra mile. "We knew the collision reactions weren't very friendly and that was the first thing to be fixed on the sequel along with the wall-scraping," he admits. "In general people were much more hardcore in those days and the people who did buy it and put the time in to master it are still fans of the game because getting it right gave you back a lot of satisfaction. You just couldn't get away with that these days."



everyone down at the same time. With the effect of them remaining the same, the power of each individual weapon didn't matter until we came to *WipEout 2097*. That's when we introduced shield strength." While some gamers loved the satisfaction of being able to take out an opponent with a carefully placed missile there were just as many who felt that the hi-tech weaponry actually got in the way of *WipEout*'s core racing. Is this something Burcombe agrees with? "Absolutely not; taking the weapons out of *WipEout* would have been like taking them out of the various *Mario Kart* titles – you can't do it as they are there to actually balance the gameplay. *WipEout* was all about combat-racing not just pure racing."

WipEout was also about music. Thumping club tunes and trance tracks from



» Narrow canyons, undulating tracks, blisteringly fast visuals; *WipEout* had it all.

a variety of now popular artists dominated the track list and perfectly captured the frenetic gameplay. Hammering around the track, while desperately wrestling with *WipEout*'s sensitive controls and trying to keep out of the way of rapidly approaching missiles was made all the better when it was being accompanied by banging tunes from the likes of Leftfield, Orbital and CoLD SToRAGE. It's hard to see how an Italian plumber could be behind *WipEout*'s scintillating soundtrack, but that's exactly what happened. Although admittedly, it's a far more tenuous link than before. Burcombe continues the tale. "Right from the outset – Techno and trance just had to be a part of it," he begins. "It came from one of those 'great gaming moments' where I was finishing the very last race of the 150cc class in *Super Mario Kart*, but with the sound turned down and Age Of Love's 'Age Of Love' blasting out from the Hi-Fi. The music peaked as I crossed the line in first by about a tenth of a second after an insanely close race and that was it… the music fitted the moment so well it just had to be in *WipEout* to drive the action along."

With the music style decided on the next course of action was the difficult task of persuading record companies to actually get on board the project. "Don't forget, this was all in the infancy of licensing CD quality music for games, so the record companies weren't that familiar with what we wanted to do," continues Burcombe. "At first they didn't initially see it as a way to help sell records. As a consequence of this attitude, not many bands were initially approached for the first *WipEout*, but Phil and Paul Hartnoll of Orbital were different, very enthused and wanted to write tracks with the game in mind. With so much credibility onboard, others would soon follow and nowadays it's an established stream of revenue for the record companies."

It wasn't just music that was licenced though. *WipEout* is also memorable for the artwork of The Design Republic that features heavily, both in-game and throughout *WipEout*'s instruction manual. Throw in billboards that were littered around the courses with advertisements for Psygnosis' other titles and *WipEout* looked like nothing else around.

"I'll let you into a secret," begins Carus when we question him about Psygnosis' clever use of advertising. "The billboards were originally put in place to hide circuit visibility issues. Later on they became integral to the look of the product but initially it certainly wasn't a creative decision – it was a technical design issue. As for the actual graphic design… well a guy called Keith Hopwood should be credited for getting Design Republic involved. At first it was just for the box artwork. But one day I

> "FROM A GAMEPLAY POINT OF VIEW POWERDROME WAS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW NOT TO DO IT AS FAR AS I WAS CONCERNED" NICK BURCOMBE

"PEOPLE WITH A KEEN EYE FOR RETRO GAMES WILL ACTUALLY SPOT A WIPEOUT SHIP ON THE INTRO SEQUENCE FOR THE AMIGA GAME MATRIX MARAUDERS" LEE CARUS

saw a fax from DR on someone's desk – I loved the header they used on their fax! So much so that I scanned it in and projected it onto the side of a ship! Everyone loved it and from that moment on DR became far more heavily involved."

While the aesthetics had proved to be a relatively organic process the actual design was proving to be a trickier prospect. As well as the aforementioned code re-write, additional time was spent trying to perfect *WipEout*'s eight courses. "Making good circuits was easily the most difficult aspect of the game in terms of production," confirms Burcombe. "The data pipeline was still being written when the tracks were ready to go beyond the "paper design". As for the paper designs, well they were exactly that – sketches on A3 with notation for the elevation and width of the track. Getting them built in Softimage and tested at Rapier-class-speeds to iron the problems was a slow and iterative process that involved close collaboration between both game design and art."

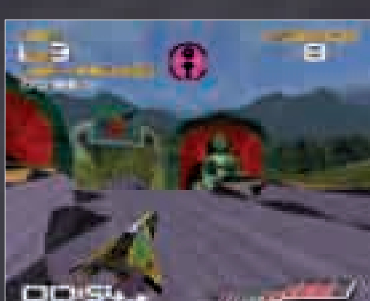
Considering the re-writes and difficulty with track design, we began to wonder if anything had been cut short or dropped from the original game in order for Psygnosis to make its relatively short release date. "Not really," begins Burcombe. "Admittedly, the AI behaviour wasn't very sophisticated, but then again we were right at the start of the console's lifespan and the fact we got a game completed by launch was a near miracle. I think the game stuck to the rules of the design fairly well." Surely there were things you wanted to improve though? "Absolutely," he continues. "Everything can always be improved. That's why the sequel was so much better as a game and more focused from a design point of view." Carus is even more frank when talking about *WipEout*'s art direction. "There wasn't any," he flatly states. "The artists all went off and created tracks in relative isolation with no real focus. If you load up the game now this will become glaringly obvious."

Despite several teething problems, *WipEout* went on to become an enormous hit and proved a firm favourite with both critics and consumers alike. It's arguably one of the first games that can be associated with making videogaming cool, and thanks to a clever marketing campaign Psygnosis and Sony did everything it could to ensure that *WipEout* stayed firmly in the public's conscience. As well as a concept video appearing in the Angelina Jolie flick *Hackers*, *WipEout* found a new underground audience when booths were installed in various nightclubs around the country, something Carus admits made a huge difference to the game's reception. "Susie Campbell did a sterling job on the marketing side, and while we didn't have any real influence in where it was marketed we'd certainly have regular 'brainstorming' sessions at Liverpool's Cream," he laughs. "Taking *WipEout* down the club route was a natural thing to do because of its audio track and because we wanted to tap into that particular culture."

Psygnosis certainly tapped into the culture and *WipEout* went on to become a huge international hit that has spawned several sequels across the PlayStation, PlayStation 2 and PSP. While no official announcement has been made yet, it's only going to be a matter of time before the classic series receives a PlayStation 3 makeover and in the meantime it's possible to download the original 1995 classic on the PlayStation 3's network. It would appear that the franchise's popularity shows no signs of waning. "*WipEout* was very much 'of its moment' and successfully made gaming cool – I think in many ways it's still perceived that way now," offers Carus when asked about its enduring success. "That's right," continues Burcombe, "it's just so damn cool. Personally, I just want to play a multiplayer PS3 *WipEout*. Now THAT would be awesome!"



» Your opponent ahead has a shield. It's not going to be easy to take him out.



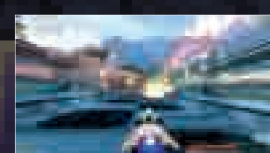
» Darran is rubbish at *WipEout*. Look at his position in all these screenshots. See… Rubbish!

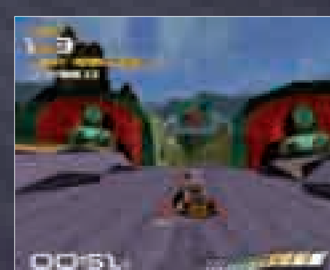
PURE LOVE

After the bitter disappointment that was *WipEout Fusion* (oh come on, you all know it wasn't that great) SCE Studios Liverpool (Psygnosis' new moniker) went back to basics and tried to recapture the feel of the original hit.

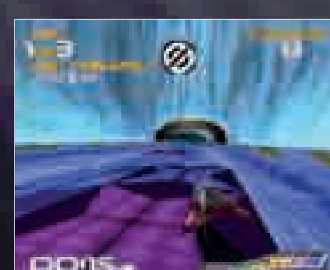
WipEout Pure was the final product and it was a fantastic return to form, featuring neigh-on perfect controls, a sublime soundtrack featuring 20 artists (a far cry from the original release) and an excellent difficulty curve. Best of all, there were even hidden tracks from earlier *WipEout*s, including Karbonis, Sagarmatha and Manor Top.

SCE Studios Liverpool continued to support the excellent racer with several downloadable expansion packs that offered everything from old tracks to new skins and teams. It may have looked a million miles away from the PlayStation release, but it managed to capture the spirit of the original game and to us that's all that matters.





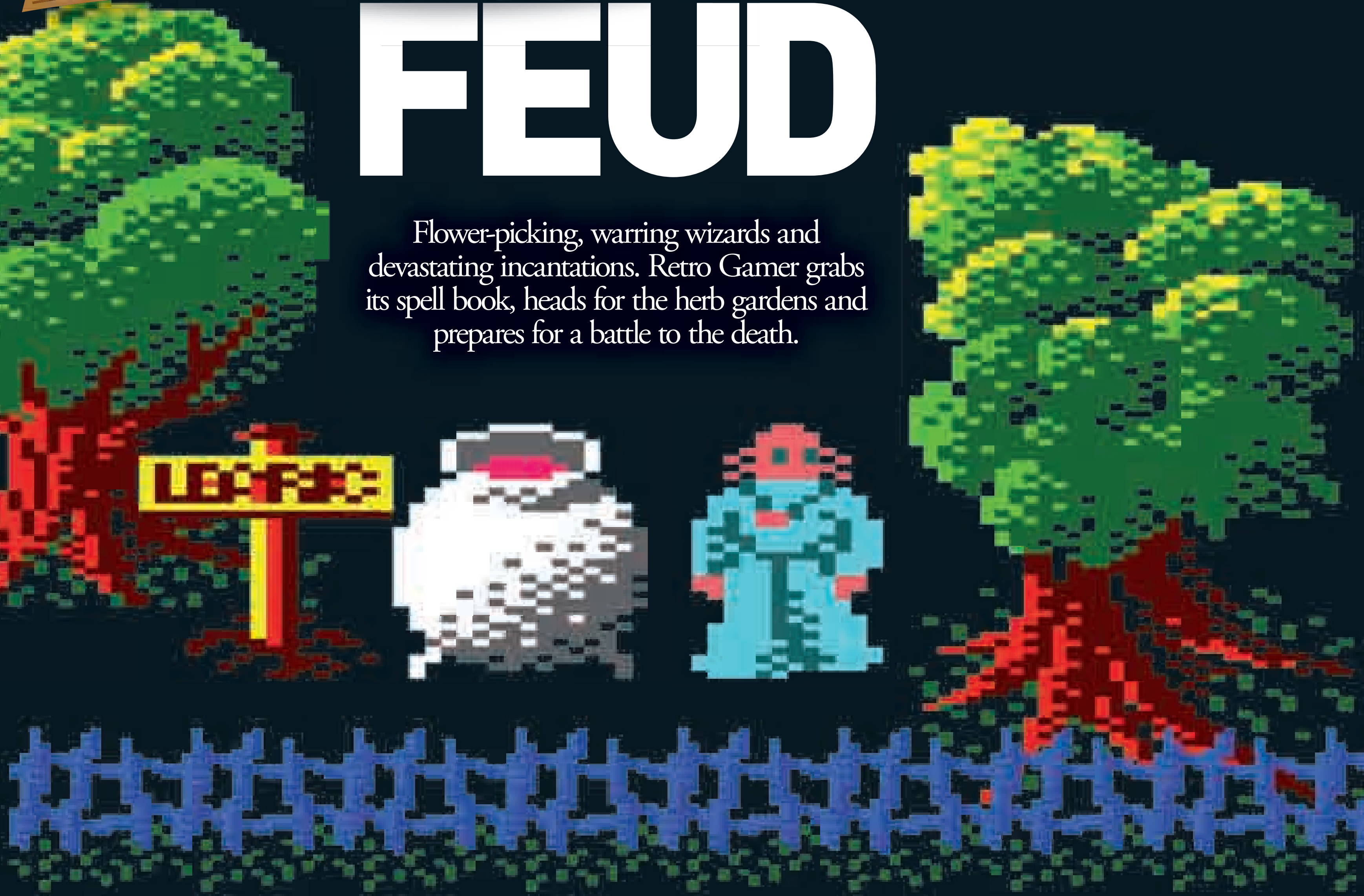
» *WipEout*'s time attack mode proved to be one of its more enduring features and constantly made you go back for one more go.



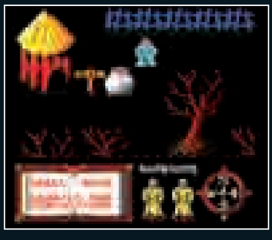
» It might look rather basic here, but when you're hurtling along with all the speed of a rocket you don't really tend to notice.

THE CLASSIC GAME

FEUD

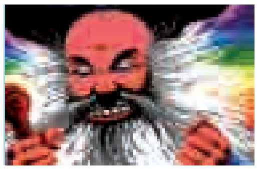


Flower-picking, warring wizards and devastating incantations. Retro Gamer grabs its spell book, heads for the herb gardens and prepares for a battle to the death.



» This is where your journey begins. You're going to need a lot of herbs in order to defeat your wayward brother.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** BULLDOG (MASTERTRONIC)
» **DEVELOPER:** BINARY DESIGN
» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1

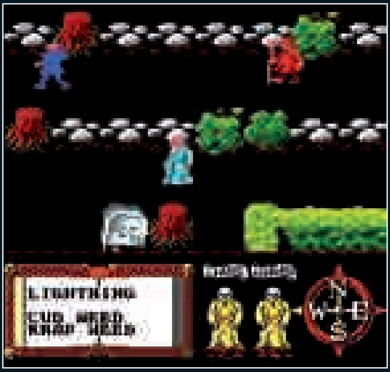
Sometimes it's possible to spot a classic game from a mile off. Often critically acclaimed and filled with incredibly innovative ideas that practically jump out at you, its pedigree is there for all to see and admire and you can usually guarantee that it'll be popping up in classic polls several years down the line. Other times though, despite initial high praise, a game can sometimes slip below the radar, only to be lost to all but the most ardent of gamers. The Pickford brothers' *Feud* is one such game.

Often jokingly referred to by the Pickford brothers – Jon created the original design, while Ste worked on the visuals – as 'gaming's first deathmatch against a computer opponent', *Feud* remains a refreshingly enjoyable romp that has weathered the last 20 years exceptionally well and shows no sign of getting stale. It also came up with the idea of featuring sibling rivalry in a videogame long before Kojima got in on the act with *Metal Gear Solid*'s Liquid and Solid Snake.

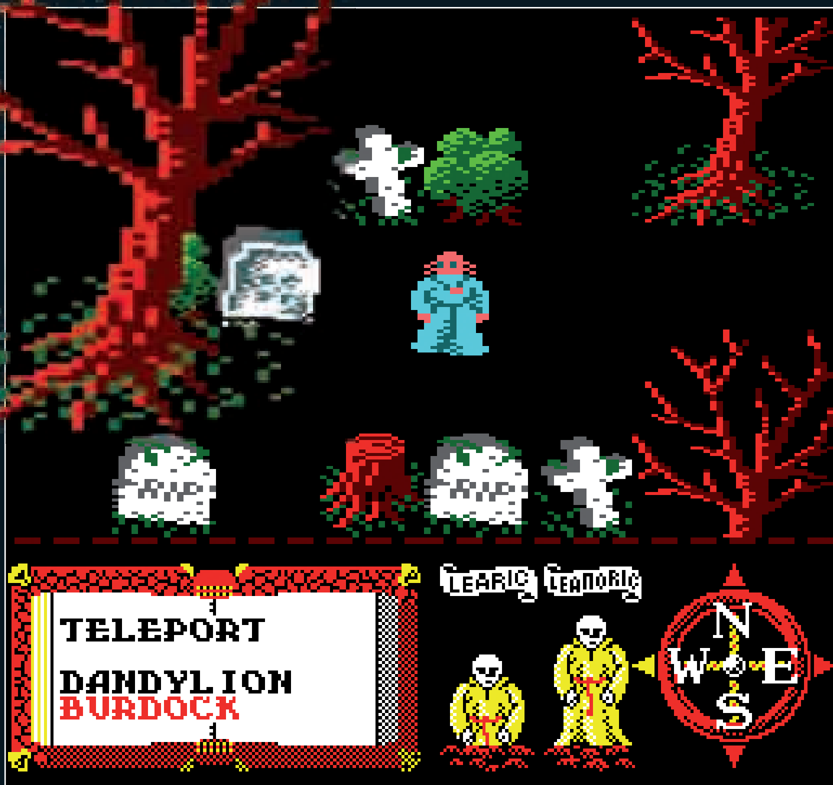
Unlike Kojima's siblings, the Pickfords' creations didn't have hi-tech weaponry, advanced combat training or computer skills to rely on; they simply resorted to good old-fashioned spellcraft to solve their problems. For you see, Learic and Leanoric were two rival warlocks with a hatred for each other that was so great even Noel and Liam Gallagher would blush.

Feud begins when the two warring brothers are at the end of their tethers, and finally realise that they're never going to be able to get along with each other. Therefore they decide that the only way to solve the issue is by competing in one last fight. This time though, instead of turning each other into animals or taking out their anger on the simple villagers they decide to fling spells until the vanquished brother is resting in the cold hard ground.

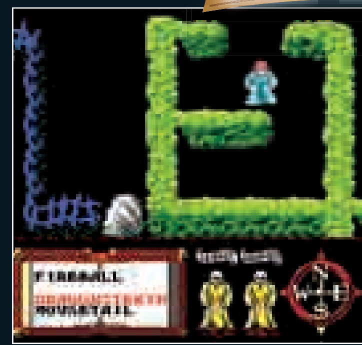
And thus begins one of the tensest gaming experiences ever created for an 8-bit micro (or 16-bit if you were lucky enough to own the Amiga version). What's interesting about *Feud* is that while the two brothers had a variety of deadly spells at their disposal, they couldn't actually use them until they had acquired the correct ingredients (each of the 12 spells required two components). Therefore the early stages of *Feud* had you frantically searching the countryside for suitable herbs and roots that could be used to create the many potent spells



» Dozy villagers will often annoy you by getting in your way. Get revenge by turning them into zombies.



» The two figures to the right of your spellbook depict the current health of each wizard.



» Early games will see you constantly walking into dead ends. Time to learn that map.



» Don't worry, the screenshot is supposed to look like this. Leanoric proves he's a dab hand at flinging lightning bolts.

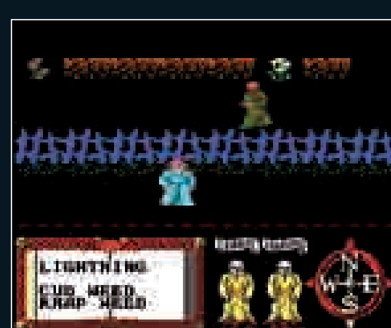
that were needed to defeat your evil brother Leanoric. Of course, gathering these resources was far from easy, mainly because the countryside the two brothers lived in was spread across 90 beautifully drawn screens and filled with some seriously devilish mazes to negotiate. Indeed, your first few plays normally ended with frustration, as you constantly found yourself walking into dead ends, a herb often lying just out of reach. Once you'd figured out *Feud*'s clever layout however, progress became far easier and allowed you to focus on your next objective – staying out of your brother's way until you were ready to actually deal with the bugger.

And this is where the beauty of *Feud* truly shines – at least on the Amstrad and Spectrum versions – because while you were trying to gather plants like Cud Weed and Knap Weed (they make great lightning bolts don't you know) your brother was doing exactly the same thing. Yes *Feud* looked the biz with its bold cartoony visuals and stirring soundtrack, but what made the Pickfords' creation truly stand apart from other titles of the time was the fact that your brother Leanoric came across as a living, breathing player. This was no mean feat when you consider the limitations of the hardware. Therefore, while you were busy planning strategies and working your way through the mazelike countryside, your brother was doing exactly the same thing.

Fortunately a compass in the bottom-right corner of the screen would point out your brother's position in the game world, so you generally had a good idea where the devious warlock would be hiding. Sooner or later though the need to reach certain locations – the herb garden for example featured a variety of useful herbs – in order to complete specific spells meant that the two rivals would eventually run into each other. And woe betide the wizard who entered a battle with no spells available…

Fireballs, sprites and the aforementioned lightning bolts were just a few of the deadly offensive spells that both skilled wizards had access to and a successful hit with them considerably drained your energy (depicted by two on-screen wizards who would slowly sink into the ground). Freeze spells held your opponent in place, hopefully allowing you to use more dangerous incantations, while spells like Doppelganger, Protect and Invisible granted you with ways of deflecting Leanoric's continued attacks. What's interesting is that the more dangerous spells were often a lot harder to acquire, so *Feud* actually required a fair amount of strategy in order to defeat your annoying sibling. Did you simply keep close to home, (you have to return to your hut and a huge cauldron in order to create spells) or did you stray further afield and risk stumbling into your brother and a potentially fearsome arsenal of spells? It's an interesting dilemma that worked perfectly, unless you owned a C64 (see boxout). In fact, it worked so well that the brothers are now promising an update, although their website does stress that its format will be a little different to what we've grown so accustomed to. Still, if it's half as good as the 1987 original we'll be first in line to buy it.

IT WORKED SO WELL THAT THE BROTHERS ARE NOW PROMISING AN UPDATE, ALTHOUGH THEIR WEBSITE DOES STRESS THAT ITS FORMAT WILL BE A LITTLE DIFFERENT TO WHAT WE'RE SO ACCUSTOMED TO



» He may look friendly but the owner of the herb garden will rob you of energy if you get too close to him.

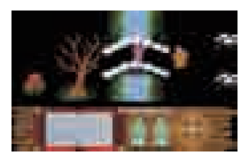
PITY THE C64

Thanks to the introduction of the Pickford brothers' new website (www.zee-3.com) it's possible to find out why the C64 conversion was so different to the superior Amstrad and Spectrum outings.

"John wasn't on the *Feud* team, he was just the guy who had come up with the game design," begins Ste Pickford. "So the C64 coder choose to ignore him. He didn't get the idea that there was a properly designed map for the game, even though it didn't scroll smoothly like other C64 games. The map was split into screen-sized pages. He decided to ignore the layout data for each screen's objects, which I'd prepared, and plonked trees and bushes around randomly on each screen.

As he had no map stored in memory he was unable to use the AI code for the enemy wizard, which was the heart of the game. So on the C64 only Leanoric's position on screen was tracked, not his position on a map. Once he walked off screen he would appear back on screen again after a random delay.

And because of dodgy positioning, there were loads of sections where two screens didn't join up properly so you would walk into trees and walls as you flipped screens. Rubbish."

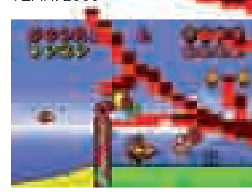


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

GLIDER RIDER
SYSTEMS: VARIUOS 8-BIT
YEAR: 1986

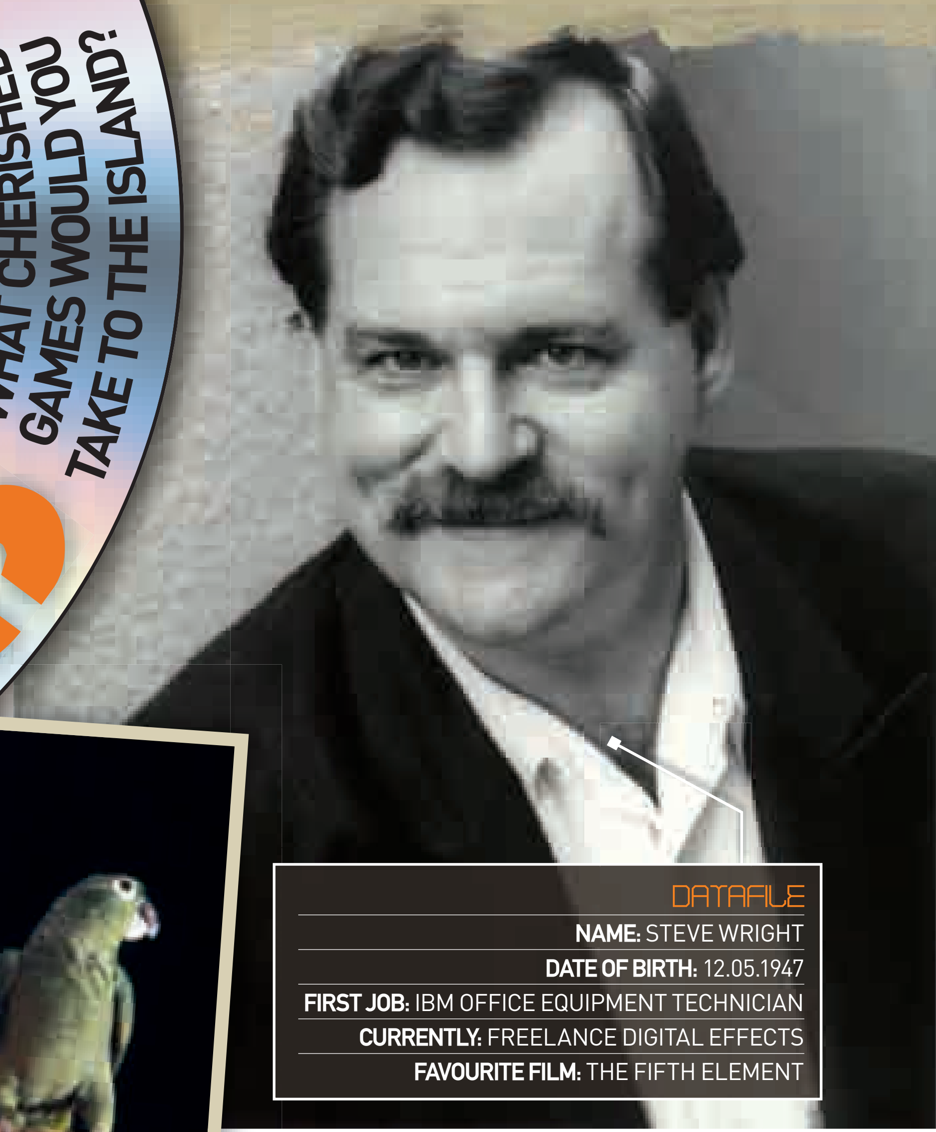
PLOK!
SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1992

NAKED WAR
SYSTEMS: PC
YEAR: 2006



DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?



DATAFILE

NAME: STEVE WRIGHT

DATE OF BIRTH: 12.05.1947

FIRST JOB: IBM OFFICE EQUIPMENT TECHNICIAN

CURRENTLY: FREELANCE DIGITAL EFFECTS

FAVOURITE FILM: THE FIFTH ELEMENT





» **Above:** Steve at the Children's Television Workshop, waiting patiently for a high-level meeting with Big Bird. **Right:** Steve 'Long John' Wright in his Atari days. Arriba the Parrot couldn't look at the shirt either.

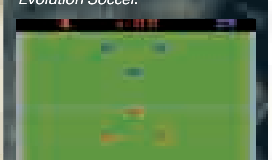
STEVE WRIGHT

IS IT A FORMER RADIO ONE DJ? IS IT A DEADPAN COMEDIAN? NO, IT'S STEVE WRIGHT THE VCS CODER, ATARI INNOVATOR AND SAVIOUR OF SUPERMAN III . PAUL DRURY DISCUSSES PELÉ, BIG BIRD AND WEARING PANTS OUTSIDE YOUR TROUSERS

YOU MUST PLAY...

Pelé's Soccer

The missing link between *Pong* and *Kick Off*. Steve Wright's debut on the VCS showcased some fancy programming tricks on screen, with vertical scrolling and some clever sprite splitting, along with pioneering the concepts of a back-story to a game and the benefit of a big-name endorsement. Admittedly, this works best as an historical document rather than an engrossing videogame (and the goalies seem to be guarding the 'end zone' instead of attempting to save shots) but it still warrants plugging in, if only to see the early DNA of *Pro Evolution Soccer*.



"When I was at college, you couldn't find the word 'computer' in a dictionary," begins Steve Wright. "Transistors were just starting to replace vacuum tubes. Man, I had to take a class in vacuum tubes. I didn't know about videogames until I started at Atari."

Wood-grain consoles and plastic joysticks were indeed some way off when Wright graduated from San Jose State in the Sixties. After the slight inconvenience of the Vietnam War, he landed a job at the mighty IBM as a technician, before switching to a company that used IBM's electronic typewriters as printers for their 'intelligent terminals'.

"We had this thing called a logic board with chips attached to it, and diodes. It used the Intel 4004, the first microprocessor ever put into production, which didn't even have a byte – it just had a 4-bit nibble."

As primitive as it was, the experience of working with printed circuit boards of any kind made Wright something of an electronics wizard back then. Thus, when Atari, bolstered by the success of the VCS (or Video Computer System), became the biggest purchaser of integrated circuits, they needed someone who could ensure their production line was not installing defective graphics chips and costing them an arm and a leg. Up stepped Wright, and with a little help from half a dozen Fairchild Sentry 7 machines – "they were real behemoths, the size of four refrigerators stuck together and cost, like, $10 million" – he supervised the testing and inspection process that allowed us all to play *Combat*, unabated.

Naturally, Wright became intimate with those virgin chips and after a spell as training manager, he moved into the games development division in 1979. It coincided with an upsurge of interest in the noble sport of football in the United States, and marketing saw an opportunity to cash in. They assigned new boy Wright to the project, presumably due to his familiarity with the sport the Americans oddly refer to as 'soccer'.

"Was I familiar with it? Of course not," roars Wright. "I had to go out and buy a book on soccer and watch some matches. I had to learn the game."

And if you thought coding a cartridge based on a sport you had never played was not daunting enough, Wright also had the challenge of interpreting the ancient







» **Left and below:** *Pelé's Soccer*: maybe not the beautiful game, but a valiant effort for 1980.



» **Left top and bottom:** Steve worked on a series of VCS games based on *Sesame Street* characters. Sadly, a gay dating sim featuring Bert and Ernie never materialised.

custom of 22 men chasing a pig's bladder around with only 4K of ROM and five moveable objects. When you consider these limitations, it's hard not to see *Championship Soccer* as a triumph. Wright cleverly switched between sprite modes, so that a single sprite displayed on one line could be copied and doubled several rows further down, thus creating a three-man attacking formation which pre-empted Ajax's visionary 'midfield diamond' system by a decade. He also implemented some ingenious vertical scrolling, and hitting the

"WAS I FAMILIAR WITH SOCCER? OF COURSE NOT; I HAD TO GO BUY A BOOK"

STEVE ON DEVELOPING PELÉ'S SOCCER

back of the virtual net would trigger some typically Yankee razzamatazz.

"When you scored, I wanted a 'hurrah!',"explains Wright, 'so I programmed this fireworks display. You had to write some deft code to tease out every pixel of action from such a feeble graphics chip. No game really had a payoff back then. I think that was something of a new concept."

It wasn't the only one. When asked to write the accompanying manual for the game, Wright decided to revamp the whole format. "Previously, they'd been these dreary little pamphlets that told you which buttons to press. I wanted something flashier so I put a story in it. It had these dead-end street soccer players, weeds hanging out their mouths, loitering round the goalposts in a slovenly manner and you had to inspire this ragtag bunch into a winning team. It had a storyline."

Clearly an idea with legs. As was the savvy marketing move of re-branding the game *Pelé's Soccer*, after the Brazilian legend and erstwhile New York Cosmos player signed a licensing deal with Atari. Sales of the game rocketed, and while Wright was disappointed that his original manual was replaced, he could understand the marketing logic. It was a mindset that must have helped his transition into management as, in 1980, he was promoted to the position of head of home videogame development, a role not unlike becoming keeper at the zoo.

"I was responsible for the care and feeding of a dozen programmers and that could be difficult. The game industry was making a huge amount of money. Their salaries and bonuses went up dramatically, the parking lot started to fill up with Porsches and BMWs and it all fanned their sense of importance. You had this rising rock star mentality among the programmers, but not in the minds of the rest of the corporation and that was bound to lead to tension. They were a challenge to manage."

Wright can chuckle now about golf clubs wedged in ceilings, herbal cigarettes in the toilets and the 'general frat-house behaviour' of that supremely talented but headstrong bunch. "I dealt with it with patience and long suffering. Plus I always hired a few more programmers than I actually needed, which tended to have a sobering effect on them."

Wright stresses he always felt on the side of the coders though, shielding them from unnecessary interference from an over-zealous management, and would join their ranks once more during his time at Atari. He took a hands-on role during the development of a series based on the characters from *Sesame Street*, travelling frequently to New York to meet with the Children's Television Workshop organisation and ensuring the games didn't ruffle the feathers of Big Bird. Producing educational cartridges was an admirable goal, but the project was to mark another important development.

"All the early games were written by engineers and it showed," laughs Wright. "I said to management: 'you know, there's an artistic component to videogames' and I went and hired graphic artists and musicians. I was trying to introduce the concept of artists working with programmers to make better, prettier, more interesting games."

"Remember, these were the early days and hardly anything had been worked out. It was low-hanging fruit," he replies modestly.

Wright may be self-effacing about his portfolio of lasting innovations, but his chest does swell with pride when I remind him how he came to the aid of the man of steel. In late 1982, Paramount Pictures approached Atari with a view to them providing a videogame sequence for their forthcoming *Superman* movie. The request ended up on Wright's desk. "They wanted a videogame of the future and that's what I gave them.

STELLA AND EGGS

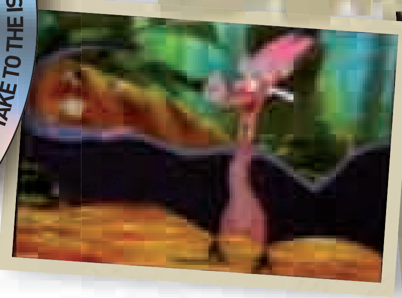
When Steve Wright moved from managing the testing department at Atari to join the VCS games development division, he understandably asked for the programming manual. "They showed me some design specs and notes on the back of papers," he recalls. "I decided to write the manual for coding the Stella – that was the in-house pet name for the chip, named after a secretary there – and pulled together the info […] but coming from a training background, I wanted to share the knowledge. Did I become a father figure to new recruits? I prefer 'older brother', but yeah, I helped get people kick-started." He kept close ties with the programmers and used his position wisely. "I was friendly with Warren Robinett, who programmed the *Adventure*. He'd embedded an element in the game, which would display his name, and when marketing got wind of it, they wanted to come down hard on him. I said: 'no, this is a great marketing ploy. We need to hide one in every game – the kids love it.' I coined the term Easter Egg."



» It was in an interview with *Electronic Games* magazine, that Steve coined the phrase 'Easter egg'.



» Steve's CGI sequence for *Superman III* was not only the highlight of the film; it gave audiences a tantalising glimpse into the future of videogames.





» **Above and right:** The sweet *Fern Gully* and the sour *Mortal Kombat: The Journey Begins* – two animated films to benefit from Steve's Digital Ink and Paint system.



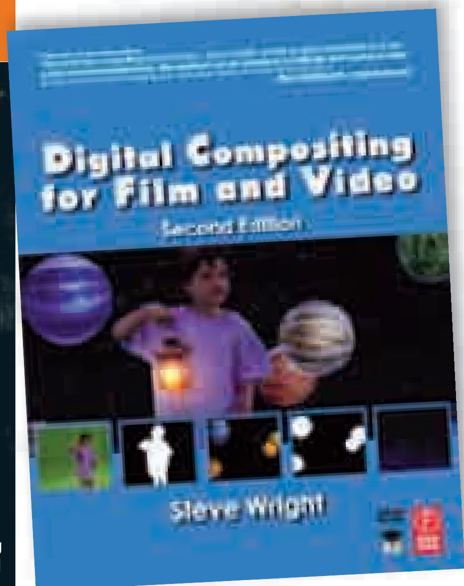
» **Above:** An expert in digital effects, Steve recently conducted training sessions in Mumbai. Lesson 1: Compositing an image of Jade Goody and Satan…

LET THE WOOKIE WIN

Though his career post-Atari would predominantly be in film, Wright's expertise in digital effects meant he wasn't averse to dipping his toe back in old waters. Having developed the first digital Ink and Paint system outside of Disney, he worked on the animated *Mortal Kombat* film and collaborated with LucasArts on the *Star Wars Chess* CD ROM. "We were the only guys in town with that Ink and Paint system, and they wanted little animations of *Star Wars* characters walking around and blasting each other." And if you were ever fortunate enough to be playing the slots in Vegas in the Nineties, you might even have taken a ride on Wright's *Galactic Tour*. "I was bumming around Hollywood and landed a job as executive producer at a 3D studio. We did this stereoscopic ride film – twin video projectors in a motion platform. It ended up being cited in Caesar's Palace."



» Chewbacca's unique interpretation of the Sicilian Defence.



» Budding special effects wizards, start here…

This was before polygons so I arranged the graphics on flat planes sandwiched in depth on the Z-axis. We used an algorithm to shift their position as the camera moves to create a parallax effect. You fly the camera through mathematically and it causes the objects to scale up and down. It wasn't true 3D – I call it 2½D – but it was a good gag."

And the punch line worked wonderfully. At the climax of *Superman III*, Christopher Reeve hurtles towards the underground lair of arch villain Robert Vaughn only to face a barrage of missiles. Footage flicks between Vaughn gripping the dual-joystick controls of a super computer, Superman in flight and Wright's videogame, which alternates between two-dimensional and three-dimensional images of the red-and-blue superhero dodging and deflecting the onslaught. It wowed audiences in 1983, and remains the most memorable minute of an otherwise rather lacklustre entry into the Superman canon.

But hang on. We know Richard Pryor built the technology for the evil genius in the film – how did Wright create such futuristic graphics? Surely not on the humble Atari VCS?

"FOR SUPERMAN III, THEY WANTED A VIDEOGAME OF THE FUTURE AND THAT'S WHAT I GAVE THEM" STEVE WRIGHT

"No. But there is a link. Programming a game in 6502 Assembly is an incredibly slow and painful process. Games could take almost a year to develop and then they'd go into testing and you'd find they were no good. I hit upon an idea for creating a rapid prototyping system, allowing you to quickly build a videogame – its graphics and gameplay – in just a few weeks. Then, if it was good (and only if), you could go off and code it… and now the design was locked down, that should take a lot less time. I got myself a Symbolic3600 – an AI machine – as the microprocessor and attached it to an Ikonus frame buffer, which was the graphics chip, and you could write high-level game logic code in LISP. It was marvellous. So when we were approached about the *Superman* project, I could say: 'Yeah, we can do that, we've got this new machine'…"

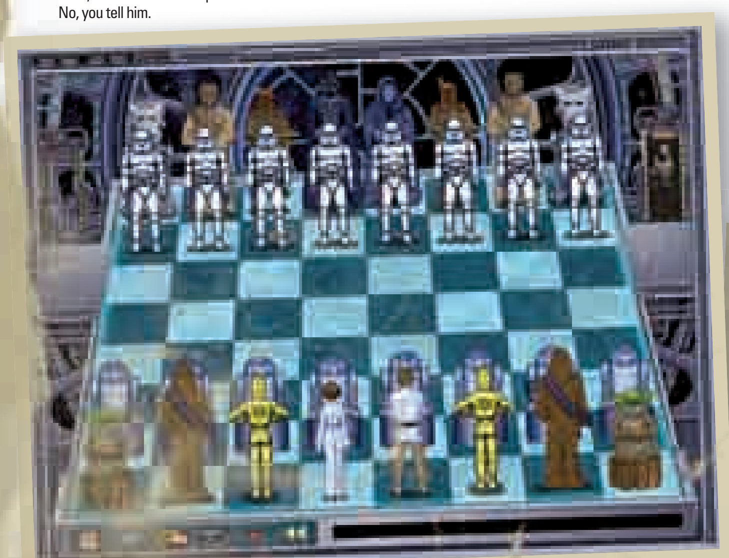
These enormously impressive results were probably Wright's finest achievement at Atari, but conversely they also triggered his departure. He was headhunted by Sega, who had noted the huge success of *Dragon's Lair* and had struck a deal with Paramount to produce laser disk games based on movie licences. Wright moved to Hollywood and spent six months assembling a games division, only for it to close abruptly as one of the many casualties of the infamous videogames crash.

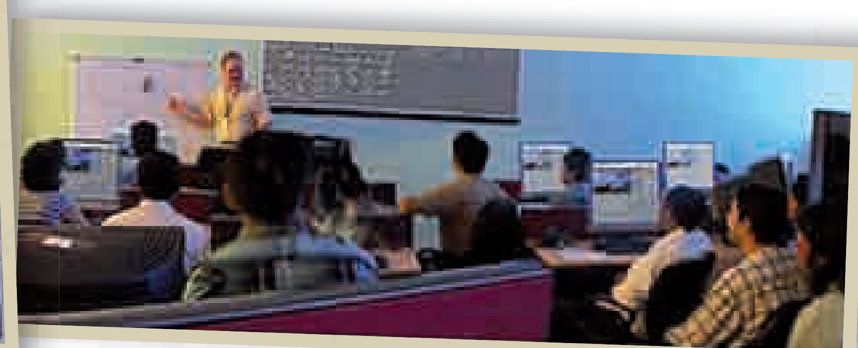
Wright was left wandering the streets of Los Angeles, but in Tinsel Town opportunities were plentiful. He got a job at Robert Abel & Associates, one of the early protagonists of CGI and although that company floundered after several unsuccessful mergers, his experience with bleeding-edge technology allowed him to set up in partnership with colleague Steve Sidley and found "a little 3D shop doing animations for commercials."

Sidley Wright & Associates flourished, and Wright has spent the last two decades in the digital effects business. His resume includes work on films as diverse and big budget as *Batman & Robin*, *Ray* and *Traffic* and even the occasional videogame-related project (see Let The Wookie Win and www.swdfx.com for the big picture). With the increasing convergence of the two industries, we wonder if he ever might make the move back to game development?

After a long pause, he says: "That's not really the direction my life is moving right now. I'm heading more for 'senior industry veteran' in visual effects – teacher, trainer, writer, course developer. Actually, when I was at Atari, Activision had just started up and they offered me a position, but Atari countered with head of game development. If I had gone over, maybe I'd still be working in videogames as they're still a major player and Atari is an historical footnote. But then I would never have got into the movie business, so no regrets. But hey, never say never."

» Look, Darth Vader is the queen. No, you tell him.

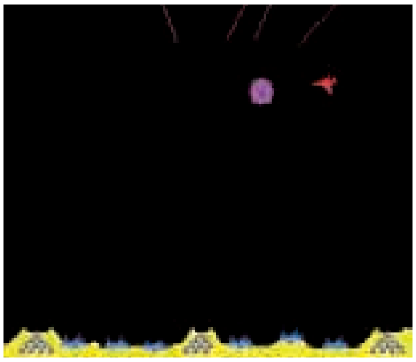




» Steve conducting training sessions in India



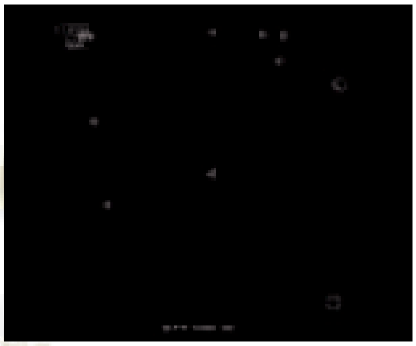
STEVE WRIGHT DESERT ISLAND DISKS



MISSILE COMMAND

ARCADE

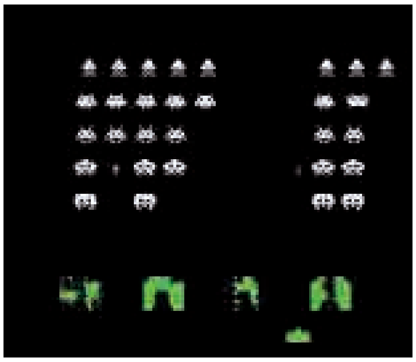
1 Trackball and triggers. There was something so gratifying about having to plop that explosion and time it just right so that the missile would hit it.



ASTEROIDS

ARCADE

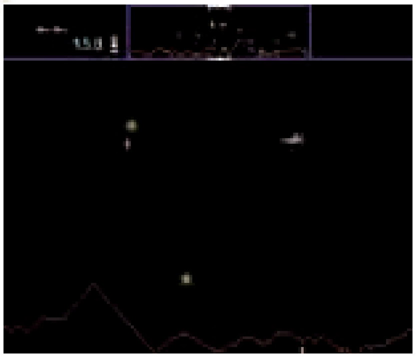
2 I'd sneak over to Atari's coin-op division just to play it. The kinetic energy, the rotating scale, the sliding, the timing… I really loved that game.



SPACE INVADERS

ARCADE

3 Atari had a demo room in the main corporate headquarters and it had all the latest games in there. As an employee, I could go in there 24/7 and enjoy all the arcade games I could eat. This was one of them.



DEFENDER

ARCADE

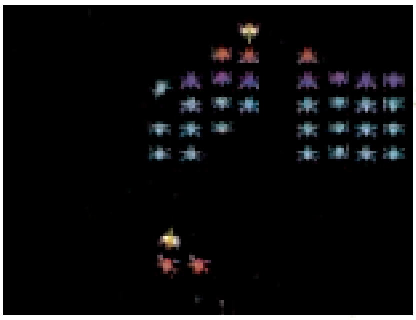
4 Another arcade classic. Well, I was there during the classic era. With *Defender*, it was the kinematics, the action and the sound effects. Just so exciting. Was I daunted by all the buttons? Oh no, I was a twitch master back then. Loved those twitch games – anything with frenetic action.



JOUST

ARCADE

5 You had to get your rhythm right to fly from level to level and it added a whole new gaming concept. You weren't just blasting things. Then there was the co-operative play… though I tended to stick to playing competitively.



GALAXIAN

ARCADE

6 It was conceptually analogous to *Space Invaders* but with more colour and more dynamic gameplay. Like *Space Invaders* squared. And yeah, I was pretty good. Course I was.



PITFALL

ATARI VCS

7 Back then, Activision raised the bar in terms of squeezing all the aesthetics out of the VCS. Putting its first five games next to five Atari cartridges, you could see how much more beautiful their graphics were. They paid attention to that. It took a while before we said, 'How come their games look so much better?'

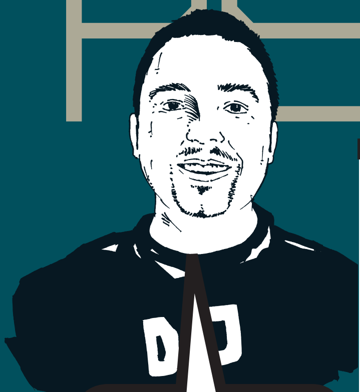


STAR RAIDERS

ATARI 800

8 When I worked for Atari, I had an incredible home entertainment system. And I had all the games out there. I was product manager and I needed to know… plus I loved them. This was a spectacular game, beautifully done, wonderful sound effects, fabulous gameplay and I just loved it. I could play it for hours.

RETRORATED

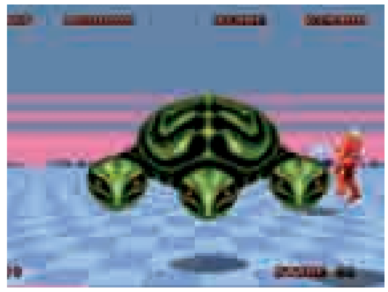


The Wii now has over 40 games on its virtual console service. Initially releasing five games a week, the service has now slowed down, but still manages to compete with Microsoft's Xbox Live service. There's far too many new releases to list over the next three pages, but here's a selection of some of the very best and worst of what's available.

SPACE HARRIER II

INFORMATION

- **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
- **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800
- **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE, GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
- **60HZ:** NO



***Space Harrier II* is the perfect example of an old classic that's nowhere near as good as you once remembered it to be.**

There are numerous reasons for our disappointment. It's hard to gauge distance because the scrolling is so jerky and erratic, meaning that enemies are suddenly in front of you before you have time to react. The music and bosses aren't anywhere near as inventive as those of *Space Harrier*, and the pedestrian speed that the game travels at kills any sense of the excitement that the original arcade machine had. Along with *Altered Beast* and *Columns*, this is one Mega Drive title that's definitely not worth spending those precious points on.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

INFORMATION

- **DEVELOPER:** DONKEY KONG COUNTRY
- **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800
- **CONTROL METHODS:** GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
- **60HZ:** OPTIMISED 50HZ



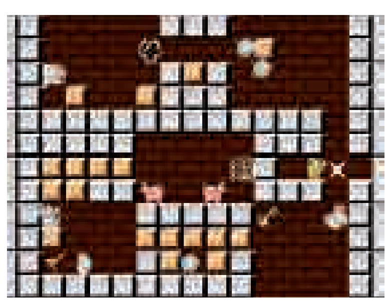
A word of warning: don't spend 800 points on *Donkey Kong Country* if you only have access to a GameCube controller.

Whether it's been done by accident or whether it's a rather conniving plan by Nintendo to push you in the direction of its Classic Controller, all the buttons have been mapped to peculiar places, meaning that even simple actions like running and jumping at the same time prove to be a real chore (they're correct on the Classic Controller). It's a shame really, as *Donkey Kong Country* is otherwise a very slick and enjoyable platformer that's still a delight to play through today. Just remember to buy some Calms pills, though, as it's a lot tougher than we remember it.

SOLOMON'S KEY

INFORMATION

- **DEVELOPER:** TECMO
- **MARKET POINTS COST:** 500
- **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE, GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER. **60 HZ:** NO



If there's one thing we like about the Virtual Console it's that, occasionally, it will spit out an old classic that you would have otherwise long forgotten.

The delightful *Solomon's Key* is one such title and it's a very clever blend of genres that requires you to combine platforming dexterity with good old-fashioned puzzle solving. Taking place within a single screen filled with deviously placed blocks each stage requires you to collect a key and reach the exit. Whilst the levels are filled with unpleasant monsters you're able to manipulate the blocks in order to kill/avoid enemies. It's looks simplistic, but there's a lot of depth for your 500 points

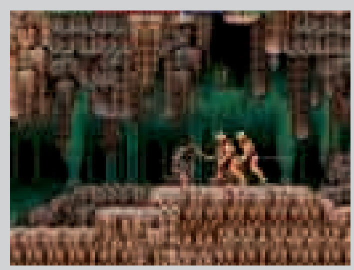


MOTO ROADER

INFORMATION

- **DEVELOPER:** HUDSON SOFT
- **MARKET POINTS COST:** 600
- **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE, GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER.
- **60HZ:** YES

You should only consider purchasing this cross between *Super Sprint* and *Micro Machines* if you can truthfully answer yes to the following question: Do you have four friends on tap at any time to play a reasonably entertaining game? Do you like a 'catch up' system that rudely shunts you forward when you trail behind other cars? Do you like a fiddly control system that makes it painfully hard to steer your vehicle? Are you quite happy to spend 600 points when the superior sequel is bound to get released at a later date? You do? Well, we heartedly advice you to stick with *Moto Roader* then; we're going back to *F-Zero*.



SUPER CASTLEVANIA

INFORMATION

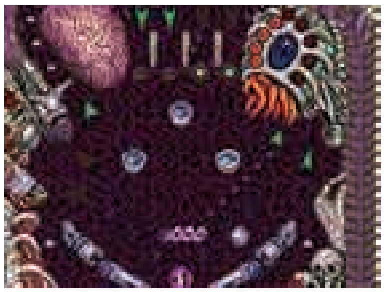
- **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
- **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800
- **CONTROL METHODS:** GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
- **60HZ:** OPTIMISED

We're still in the infancy on the Virtual Console and we're already getting some great games. *Super Castlevania* is the second SNES game to be released by Konami and like *Super Probotector* it's a stonker. It suffers from annoying mapping issues, as other SNES games do (Nintendo really wants you to buy that Classic Controller), but it's still great. With snazzy Mode 7 effects, a scintillating soundtrack and some challenging bosses, *Super Castlevania* is a riot from start to finish.

ALIEN CRUSH

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** HUDSON SOFT
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 600
» **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE. GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
» **60HZ:** YES

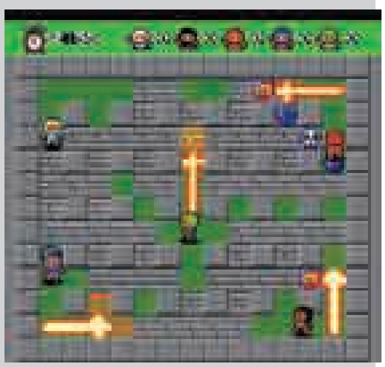


100 points on the Virtual Console equates to roughly 75 pence, which is arguably not a lot of cash by anyone's standards. Still, as far as buying games on the VC goes, these 75 pennies can make a hell of a lot of difference. Case in point *Alien Crush*. This wonderfully polished pinball title has a decent main table, solid ball physics and plenty of excellent table features, and all for just 600 points. Nintendo's own Pinball title, the imaginatively named *Pinball*, has none of the above, was actually free on *Animal Crossing* and is only 100 points cheaper. All of a sudden owning those 75 extra pennies makes all the sense in the world.

BOMBERMAN '93

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** HUDSON SOFT
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 600
» **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE, GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
» **60HZ:** YES



Stop press. Despite the fact that *Wario Ware: Smooth Moves*, *Rayman: Raving Rabbids* and *Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz* (that's a lot of colons) all have multiplayer modes, none of them can hold a torch to this venerable PC Engine classic.

Allowing support for up to five players, *Bomberman '93* provides, quite frankly, the most fun you can currently have on Nintendo's new console and it clocks in at less than a fiver as well. Bargain. Even the single-player game is pretty good (something of a rarity in most *Bomberman* games) so there's no reason why you shouldn't download this as soon as you get the opportunity.

TOE JAM & EARL

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800
» **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE, GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER. **60 HZ:** NO



We've played some crazy games in the past, but none of them have come anywhere near to the sheer out and out ludicrousness of Sega's *Toe Jam & Earl*.

A simple collect-'em-up at heart (you need to find the ten missing pieces of the alien duo's spaceship) *Toe Jam & Earl* is filled with some of the strangest adversaries to ever be let loose in a videogame, and range from dancing hula girls to giant hamsters in plastic balls. Featuring a solid two-player mode and some huge maps to explore, *Toe Jam & Earl*'s offbeat humour is definitely not for everyone, but if you are prepared to take the plunge you'll discover a charming platformer



GUNSTAR HEROES

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800
» **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE, GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER. » **60HZ:** NO

It's amazing to think that this remarkable little title is now a whopping 14-years-old. Man we're getting old!

It feels like only yesterday that we were picking our jaws off the floor after witnessing its mind-boggling visuals and furiously fast-paced gameplay and it still, all these greying years later, plays like a dream.

Filled with amazing special effects (amazing may be a little strong admittedly), a cracking two-player mode and enough bosses to fill an encyclopaedia on the subject, *Gunstar Heroes* doesn't let up for a second and remains one of the Mega Drive's finest run-'n'-gun titles and one of the best games currently available on the Virtual Console. High praise indeed.



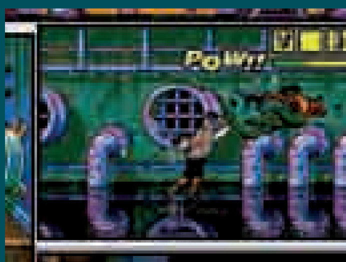
TENNIS/BASEBALL/ICE HOCKEY/SOCCER

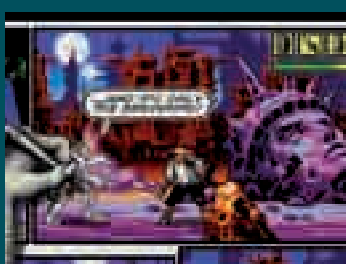
INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 500
» **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE, GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER. » **60 HZ:** NO

We're lumping all four NES sports games available together as they all suffer from the same problems. Controls on all four titles are unresponsive, while the AI is atrocious and is only matched by the mind-numbing tunes that play during each game. While a little salvation can be found when a second player joins (Tennis proves to be the most fun), you may as well stick with *Wii Sports*. It's more fun to play, the music won't send you mad and, most importantly, as it's free, it won't cost you a penny.

RETRORATED





COMIX ZONE

INFORMATION

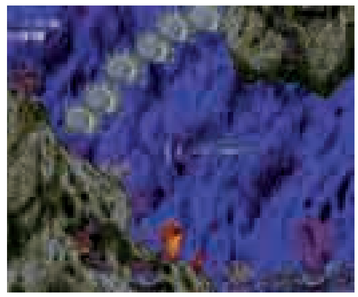
» **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800
» **CONTROL METHODS:** GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
» **60HZ:** NO

Curses, *Comix Zone* is yet another title that we can't really recommend if you have access to a PS2. Still, if you're not a member of the Sony army, or simply have money to burn then you could do a lot worse than pick up this fun brawler. With vivid visuals that are as startling as the game's premise (comic book writer gets sucked into his own creation and must fight his way out) *Comix Zone* (along with *Kid Chameleon*) is one of the Mega Drive's most underrated gems and is definitely worth picking up if you like scrolling fighters that occasionally tickle the old grey matter.

ECCO THE DOLPHIN

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** NOVATRADE
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 600
» **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE, GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
» **60HZ:** NO

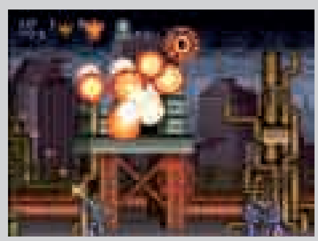


Whether you buy *Ecco The Dolphin* and several other Mega Drive games on the Virtual Console mainly depends on one thing. Do you own a PS2? You do? Then get down to the shops and pick up the excellent *Sega Mega Drive Collection*. It's only £19.99 and has *Ecco* and 31 other games on it. That means *Ecco* is only costing you about 62 pence instead of the six pounds the VC is asking for. Quite a difference, no? Granted, this leisurely swim-'em-up is still worth the VC asking price, but it's still galling to know that a far cheaper alternative is out there.

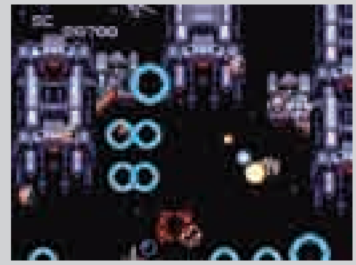
SUPER PROBOTECTOR

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 800
» **CONTROL METHODS:** GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
» **60HZ:** OPTIMISED 50HZ



Along with *Super Castlevania, Gunstar Heroes, Super Mario 64* and *Donkey Kong Country,* Konami's brilliant blaster should be one of the first VC games you consider if you only have access to a few thousand points. Filled with incredible action, *Super Probotector* has everything you could possibly want from an action game. It boasts wonderfully crafted level design, an amazing array of tough bosses and superb aesthetics. Granted it suffers from the normal control issues when playing on a Cube controller, but that's about the only negative aspect we can think of. A superb game that manages to press all the right buttons.

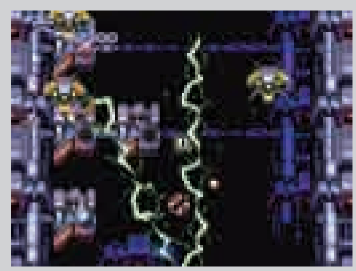


SOLDIER BLADE

INFORMATION

» **DEVELOPER:** HUDSON SOFT
» **MARKET POINTS COST:** 600
» **CONTROL METHODS:** REMOTE, GAMECUBE CONTROLLER, CLASSIC CONTROLLER
» **60HZ:** YES

The PC Engine plays host to some superb shoot-'em-ups so it's gratifying to see that three of the better ones have been released on Nintendo's new service. While *Super Star Soldier* (another VC vertical shooter) is a resoundingly solid blaster, the superior *Soldier Blade* pips it on every level. Featuring some excellent power-ups – that can be enhanced to obscene levels – challenging attack patterns and some amazingly hard bosses, *Soldier Blade* is the vertical yin to *R-Type*'s horizontal Yang. Oh, and it races along at a speed that would make a cheetah blush. Don't miss it.



» CAPCOM'S EXCELLENT PSP COMPILATIONS HEAD TO THE PS2

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION VOLUME 2

NO SLOPPY SECONDS HERE



- » **SYSTEM:** PS2
- » **PRICE:** £19.99
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** DIGITAL ECLIPSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-3
- » **FEATURED GAMES:** 1941: COUNTER ATTACK, AVENGERS, BLACK TIGER, BLOCK BLOCK, CAPTAIN COMMANDO, ECO FIGHTERS, THE KING OF DRAGONS, KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND, LAST DUEL, MAGIC SWORD, MEGA TWINS, QUIZ & DRAGONS, SIDE ARMS: HYPER DYNE, STREET FIGHTER, STRIDER, SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO, THE SPEED RUMBLER, THREE WONDERS, TIGER ROAD



There's been an absolute deluge of classic compilations appearing recently and judging by Capcom's latest release, the tide of strong titles shows no sign of slowing any time soon. While Capcom's latest selection of digital treats aren't exactly new (20 of the 21 titles have already appeared on Capcom's previous two PSP packs) that doesn't mean *Volume 2* isn't a collection that's not worth owning.

Created by legendary coders Digital Eclipse (the developer behind Sega's fantastic Mega Drive compilation), this is another superb compendium that, while not quite coming up to the enormously high standards set by the *Mega Drive Collection*, still manages to eclipse all previous Capcom compilations that Digital Eclipse has worked on.

Although no TATE modes have been included for the few vertically-orientated games that feature, the emulation itself is otherwise faultless, with all 21 games appearing identical to their arcade counterparts. Presentation is likewise of a high standard, and as with previous compilations it's obvious that Digital Eclipse is a huge fan of the company that it's working for. From the loading screens that feature key rings of classic *Street Fighter* characters, to the many hidden extras that can be unlocked, this is a Capcom fan's dream. Best of all though is the brand new version of *Quiz & Dragons* that has been included. While the original is still there in all its Americanised glory, the new version, *Capcom Quiz,* will test your Capcom knowledge to the limit. It's a superb addition and along with an in-depth tutorial to the secrets of *Street Fighter II*, easily makes up for the lack of any interviews.

Of course, peerless presentation and faultless emulation amount to nothing if the games themselves are no good, and while *Volume 2* does contain some horrendous duffers the majority range from great to stunning. *Strider*, *Magic Sword*, *Black Tiger*, *Eco Fighters*, *Side Arms* – the list of hits goes on and on and covers a wide variety of different genres. Plus there's the added bonus of new game *Tiger Road*. After the misfire that was *Capcom Classics Reloaded*, it's great to see yet another superb collection of classic games; long may it continue.



» Capcom's take on King Arthur is a rousing scrolling fighter that features levelling up, heroic characters and pitchforks.



OPINION

While *Capcom Classics Volume 2* doesn't feature as many noticeable hits as *Volume 1* it actually works in Capcom's favour. The majority of the games on offer feature timeless gameplay, and as many of them are quite obscure there's going to be plenty of hidden gems to uncover for most gamers. While it's a shame that no licence games appear, this is nevertheless another direct hit for Capcom.

John Szczepaniak



» As if we were going to feature a Capcom collection and not include an actual picture of *Strider*…



» Fans of *Ghosts 'N Goblins* and *Gunstar Heroes* would do well to check out the excellent *Midnight Wanderers*.



» *Last Duel*: a horrible, horrible game.

IN SUMMARY

Capcom Collections Volume 2 could be the best collection of arcade games you'll ever play on your PS2. Let's just hope a third pack gets commissioned.



RATING
93%

OPINION

Oh my goodness, how cool is *Capcom Quiz*? If you think you knew everything there was to know about Capcom then prepare to have your eyes well and truly opened. There's an amazing amount of trivia to go through and it's a genius idea that we'd love to see implemented in future compilations. Just stay away from *Avengers, Last Duel* and *The Speed Rumbler* though; they're truly awful.

Simon Phillips

SUPER TENNIS

A GAME HOOVED ANIMALS COULD PLAY





- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **RELEASED:** TONKIN HOUSE
- » **GENRE:** SPORTS
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** 50P-£2

HISTORY

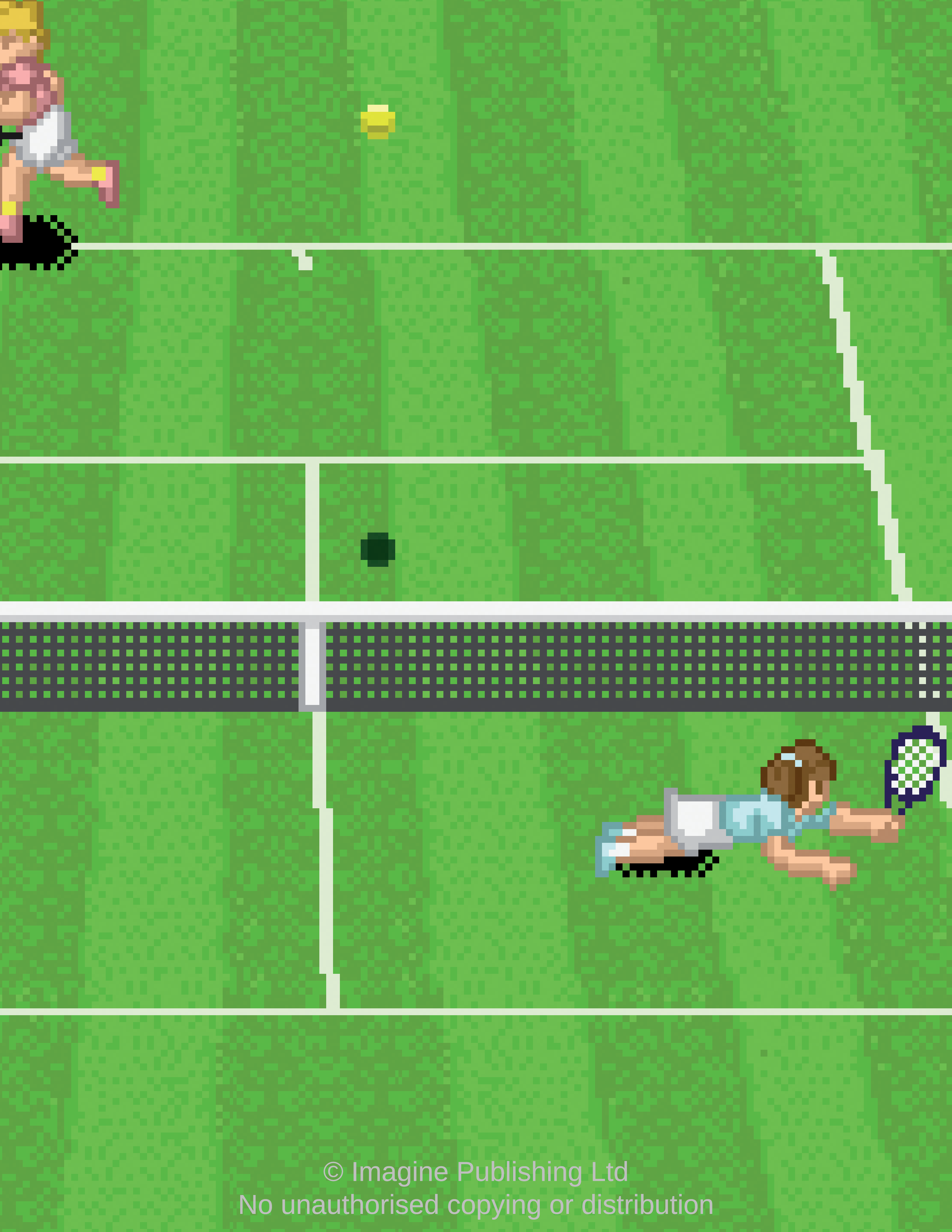


The word 'super' is misplaced. 'Simple' would be more appropriate, or even 'Easy'. 'Super' might lead you to expect the balls to move at the speed of a speeding train, or the pace of a pacing bullet. In fact, *Super Tennis* requires no such stretches of the imagination. The ball moves at a fairly normal pace; occasionally, you might even describe it as leisurely.

Everything about *Super Tennis* shirks the 'Super' epithet. The players are called things like Paul and Bill. These are not super names; they're the names of accountants or people who work in Dixons. The music certainly isn't super. If you've forgotten the almost unbearable tune that plays at every change of court then you won't want reminding of it. It's best forgotten.

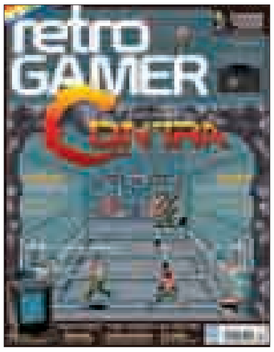
You also don't have to be 'super' to enjoy it, as *Super Tennis* is one of the most accessible games available on a console. If you've ever attempted a *Top Spin* 'Risk' shot then you will know how fiddly a tennis game can be. *Super Tennis* has no such superfluities. You press A, B, X or Y relying on timing and Bill or Paul's position on the court. That's it! It makes *Virtua Tennis* look complex. In fact, it's so wonderfully simple that you can play it two-player on an emulator with one of you using the keyboard keys and one of you using a controller and have an even battle. It feels as natural using the arrow keys as it does using the SNES controller's D-pad.

So is the 'Super' bit a joke? A subtle rejection of fascist interpretations of Nietzschian theory? Is it holding up a metaphorical Occam's razor to the videogame industry, saying more is not always more? No. No, it definitely isn't. It's probably just because a game called Easy Tennis wouldn't sell very well. But trust us, whatever the name, *Super Tennis* is well worth buying. We saw it for 50p on eBay. 50p! You can probably buy it and a SNES for about a fiver. We suggest you play it after you've done something inordinately complicated – like differentiating fractions or watching *Magnolia* – and let the glorious simplicity of it wash over you like a wave.



THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



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REALLY FISTED OFF

Dear Retro Gamer,
I have been playing *Fist II: The Legend Continues* on the C64 for over 15 years now and have never been able to complete it. I have all the scrolls and have taken them to ALL the temples and I'm still walking around aimlessly! Please can you help with either a map or walkthrough, as it's doing me nut in! I have searched everywhere on the internet and found nothing. I've even resorted to trying to find the makers of the game to see if they can help, but to no avail. Please help!
Bob Sandham, Liverpool

Once you've got the various scrolls, you need to head towards the volcano and the final confrontation with the Warlord. The route to the volcano is quite precise and if you make a 'wrong turn', you can end up wandering around endlessly. Your best bet is to track down Issue 23 (March 1987) of Zzap!64, which has a map on pages 60 and 61 that shows the locations and how they all join up. Alternatively, check out the scans of the issue at www.zzap64.co.uk.



» Bob Sandham has been playing *Fist II* for a staggering 15 years – and he's still not completed it!

FUN MARKS THE SPOT

Dear Retro Gamer,
A while ago now, my friend Gerard introduced me to Retro Gamer. It was great to see a magazine that was dedicated to classic video and computer games.

In Issue 27 you did an article called "The Best Arcade in the World". Now, being that I'm from the States and you guys are in the UK, I figured that the arcade was somewhere in Europe. Once I found out that the place was in New Hampshire though I knew I just had to go.

My friends and I ironed out a date and we finally visited Funspot last weekend, and let me tell you something: all of the YouTube videos and pictures do not do the place justice. I still cannot believe the amount of classic pinball and videogames they had. We were lucky that we visited in the winter because it wasn't that busy; it was like all of the games were there just for us!

We would like to thank you for writing that article about the arcade – if it wasn't for you we wouldn't even have known the place ever existed! Thank you once again for the article, and thank you for making a magazine that keeps classic games and systems alive and kicking! Keep up the good work!
Nicholas Lombardo



» The amazing *OutRun* was just one of the classic arcade games that Nicholas Lombardo discovered on his trip to Funspot.

We're glad that you enjoyed yourself at Funspot. With so few classic arcades surviving over here in the UK, it's refreshing to discover that sites like Funspot still exist somewhere in the world, and as long as they do, Retro Gamer will be there to cover them.

OLD GEN RULES

Dear Retro Gamer,
I just wanted to drop you a line to say how refreshing and entertaining your magazine is. What with all the fuss over next-gen consoles and the imminent arrival of the PS3 it makes a great change to find a magazine that ignores all of this and instead concentrates on the pioneering games of yesteryear. Sure, graphics may have moved on in leaps and bounds over the years, but I, like a lot of other gamers out there, feel that there's something fundamental missing from modern games, and that is the element of fun. I have to admit that I do play games on PS2, PC and PSP, and have even got a PS3 on order, but despite all of this when playing these new games they don't have the same appeal to me as back in the days of *Super Mario World* on the SNES, or blasting though *Streets Of Rage 2* on the Mega Drive and I sometimes find myself thinking back to a Christmas day about 13 years ago, unwrapping my SNES and playing *Street Fighter 2* in my own home for the first time! That feeling of just utter joy is severely lacking and I'm sure that the next-gen PS3 will do nothing to make me forget my good old SNES.

Thanks again for a thoroughly enjoyable magazine, long may Retro Gamer continue.
Brian Brigden, Hull

There's definitely something special about the older consoles and computers. Maybe it was due to everything feeling fresher at the time, or it could have just been that we were a lot younger and far less cynical. Still, it's not all bad nowadays, you can play classic PSX titles like Resident Evil *and* Ridge Racer *on Sony's new super console and Sega has also confirmed that* Streets Of Rage *is on the way.*



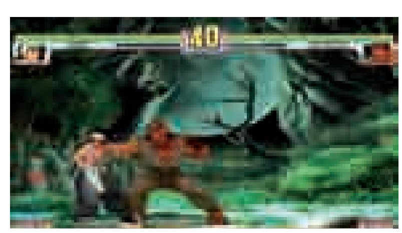
» Soon you'll be able to play classic 16-bit hits like Streets Of Rage on your shiny new PS3. It doesn't seem right somehow.

HA-DOH!-KEN

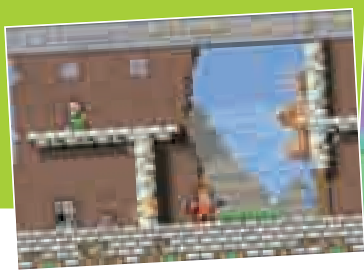
Dear Darran Jones,
I quote: "*Street fighter III: Third Strike…* yes, the new parry system put off stalwarts of Capcom's 1989 classic."

As you are obviously aware, *Street Fighter II: World Warrior* was released in 1991 not 1989. Anyway, I love your magazine, and await my copy every month; I love the Zzap/Crash layout, as it really takes me back to the golden days of gaming (or golden days of my youth).
Zippy via email

Darran's editorial was written with the knowledge that John was moving to pastures new. Unfortunately he couldn't see the mistake through his tears and has been strung up by his unmentionables.



» Darran loves *Third Strike* so much he thought *Street Fighter II* was released two years earlier than it actually was. The idiot.





FROM THE FORUM

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE ASKING A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTING THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW: WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE ARCADE GAME?

ID: Smurph

Funnily enough, it's not *Street Fighter 2*, which I spent a lot more money on originally, but the machine I went to when *Street Fighter 2* was busy: *Legend Of Hero Tonma* by Irem. It was rock hard, and has drawn me back far more in later years than *Street Fighter 2*.

ID: GetDexter

Space Harrier! Sit-down hydraulic version! I could complete the game on one credit and absolutely loved it! Used to stick a bottle of milk by my feet and by the end of the game, it would have turned into cheese...

ID: felgekarp

Final Fight, as far as I'm concerned the perfect two-player scrolling beat-'em-up.

ID: drewbar

Operation Wolf. At least back in the days when it first came out and the gun actually 'rattled' away when you shot. Geez I pushed some coins through that machine when I should have been doing other things on a school camp.

ID: Paranoid Marvin

Star Wars – the original cockpit version. The closest I will ever come to sitting behind the controls of an X-Wing.

ID: Sandinista

Galaxian. The colours, the movement, the perfectly balanced gameplay. Still as playable now as it was nearly 30 years ago.

ID: djcarlos

I think it was called "*Alien-The Gun*". Bloody enormous pulse rifle attached to a screen with loadsa acid-for-blood xenomorphs to blast....I don't think my parents really understood that one in the arcade at Skegness...

ID: Pac-Passion

Mine is *Pac-Man*, because I have a perverse affection for pie-charts, an interest in the paranormal, and a dangerous drug habit.

ID: Tellah

Track And Field (aka *Hyper Olympics*) is my favourite ever machine. Pure competitive fun. It was all about refining your own unique joystick waggling/button-bashing technique for top speeds.

ID: Confessor

Bosconian was my "money pit". It started out easy but soon the flashing red light about "Red Condition" began to beep and the game became a frantic maelstrom of mines, asteroids and spaceships.

ID: The King

I held the top score in a Southampton arcade on *Virtua Tennis* for 15 years. I became pretty much perfect at that game. After 15 glorious years at the top they wiped all the scores and my achievement was lost forever. Still, it's a great, simple, accessible title in the arcade or on a home console.

ID: MP-T

Final Fight. I spent over a tenner on that game, one windy day and still didn't complete the damn thing. That was ten pounds I could have spent on beer and tobacco!

ID: Ignoramus

The fair came to town, so my big brother and I went down with about a fiver from our parents. It was in that pre-SNES hype and my brother put all our money in *Street Fighter 2*. I didn't actually get to play it, but it was fun to watch, I suppose. God I hate my brother sometimes.

ID: Chief

OutRun. It was the closest a nine-year-old could get to driving a ferrari, and the closest I get to driving one now, come to mention it.

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RETRO SCENE

TRANSLATION NEWS ROUND-UP PARLEZ-VOUS ANGLAIS?





» Slowly but surely, more and more Japanese only titles are getting translated.

Courtesy of ROMhacking.net, Retro Gamer was informed of several exciting developments in the ROM translation community. Along with *La Mulana* on PC (reviewed over the page), there's a patch for the excellent rogue-like action-RPG *Dicing Knight* on the Wonderswan Color – both translated by *Aeon Genesis. Dicing Knight* is a fantastic though little-known title, and comes highly recommended. There's also been a patch released for *Wonder Project J2* on the N64, translating the beginning of the game into English. It's a wonderful sequel to the fantastic and already translated SNES game *Wonder Project J*, and involves you teaching a robot girl how to be human. This is a huge breakthrough and raises the number of N64 translations to three. Finally, despite being available since October, MUET finally created a webpage for his translation patch of Mega Drive shmup *Battle Mania Daiginjou* (the sequel to *Trouble Shooter*), thereby making the release "official."

REMAKE MY DAY, PUNK NEW OLD GAMES



» Despite the matrix overtones this really is a great idea, much better in the browser option though.

The flow of top quality remakes never ceases. This month we review the *Streets Of Rage* and *Typhoon 2001* remakes, but there are plenty of others well worth keeping an eye on too.

For those tired of the recent slew of rubbish *Starfox* games, there comes *Starfox: Shadows Of Lylat.* It's being created with the Freespace_Open engine, meaning that you will already need a copy of *Freespace 2* to play the game – but, despite this unfortunate condition, it's actually looking very impressive so far. It takes place after *Starfox 64*, featuring free-roaming aerial-based stages. Finally there's a remake of *3D Deathchase* in the works (pictured), which, while there's been no playable code, looks dazzlingly impressive in videos. It could quite possibly be one of the best remakes we've seen. Google the videos, and keep an eye out. There's further info on all of these games at tigsource.com.

SEGA SATURN USB DATA LINK KENT BACKUP FILES



Expert electrical engineer Kent Rittenhouse has created a Sega Saturn USB data link to enable the transfer of save files between a Saturn and Windows PC for backup purposes, and also between the Saturn and emulators such as SSF and Cassini. It also enables the Saturn's BIOS to be dumped, and small home-brew games to be loaded into its RAM. On his website Kent explains, "This project started its life when my Action Replay Plus cartridge decided to die. I lost ten years worth of game-saves. I looked around to find a device that could transfer game-saves, using current PC hardware/software. Not finding anything, I decided to design my own." It requires a Windows PC, an Action Replay Plus cartridge, and any region of Saturn. Check it out: www.gamingenterprisesinc.com.

IMPRESSIVE INDIE INFLUX ALLITERATIVE APROPOS



There's been far too many retro-styled indie releases recently to review them all, so here's a brief round-up. Back in December, the author of *Within A Deep Forest* released a new platformer, *Knytt*, which has been described as an "icebergvania" game – a title crammed with so many secrets you're unlikely to see it all.

Insert Credit's Decinoge, a sprite artist from Portugal, has released *Zamurai* (pictured) – a fun flash game he's developing for college. The dialogue drags on a bit, but the retro CGA-style visuals are amazing. It's also choc full of gratuitous fan-service.

Wolverine on Retro Remakes forums is working on a cool NES-styled game called *Hero* (pictured), which is a sequel to a same-named duotone game created by his friend (Google it!). You freely fly around with a jetpack, firing either left or right at enemies, navigating a maze-like complex. There's also *Legend Of The Lost Jewel*, a cool Sierra-style adventure game which uses a traditional 16-colour palette. It's a home-brew project, which has been worked on since 1990. Finally there's *RAIH*, which is an odd miniaturised *Castlevania*-style action game. Searching tigsource.com should yield downloads for all of these.



COMMODORE 64 IS REBORN! LIKE A PHOENIX PERHAPS



» Despite the matrix overtones this really is a great idea, much better in the browser option though.

Brought to our attention by a loyal reader, this is the Picodore 64 – a Commodore 64 PDA Palmtop created by Jason Winter.

He bought a plug-n-play Commodore 64 DVT games device from Radio Shack, on clearance for $17.99, which can be modified into a fully-capable Commodore 64 – so much so, there is quite an extensive hacking scene at http://galaxy22.dyndns.org/dtv/index.html. Afterwards he modified the device, created a shell to house it, added a PSone LCD screen, along with a variety of additional ports and drives. Most impressive of all though is the tremendous lengths he went to in order to make a functioning keyboard. The entire process is well documented with photos on his site: www.picobay.com/projects/index.html. It's well worth a visit for our readers interested in all things Commodore 64.

HACKING IS COOL

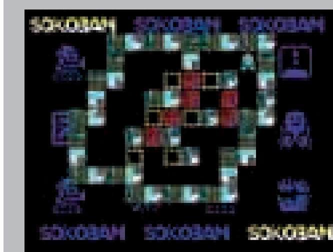
SHAME THEY DON'T TEACH IT AT SCHOOL



» Zelda Parallel Worlds may look nice, but early reports suggest it suffers from numerous design flaws.

There's been a trio of awesome ROM hack releases in recent months. There's *Blaster Master: Pimp Your Ride* (NES), which adds eight extra vehicle upgrades to the seven already present, along with major level changes to make use of them. Then there's *Super Mario World – The Second Reality Project 2* (SNES), which includes an incredibly diverse array of new levels, including ones themed around *Kirby*, *Sonic* and even *Tetris*. Finally there is *Zelda Parallel Worlds* (SNES), a hack of *Link To The Past* that changes absolutely everything, effectively giving you an entirely new *Zelda* SNES game. Unfortunately early reports have serviced that suggest that it suffers from design flaws and excess difficulty. All these patches are available from ROMhacking.net.

NEW ZX SPECTRUM RELEASE BLOCK PARTY



Spanish retro developer Compiler Software, fan of all things Sinclair, has released its latest ZX Spectrum title, *Sokoban*. Its website says, "*Sokoban* is a logical game. Your mission consists of solving 99 levels controlling the JCN-7000 robot. It has to push the objects to their destination on screen. You must be careful, because a wrong movement can block your progress. Each time you pass a level, the game will give you a password to continue. You can choose between seven graphic sets." It's basically the same block-pushing game that's appeared on nearly every format, sometimes under different names. Regardless, it's great to see the Speccy still receiving games. Download it for free at: http://compiler.speccy.org/Sokoban_en.php.

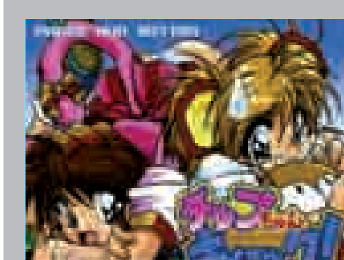
NES CHOCOHOLICS

SUGARY-SWEET COMPUTERS



For the true NES collector/fan, or simply people who like chocolate, eBay user buttlesscutlass78 has been creating NES-themed chocolate treats and selling them online. His first auction was of a large chocolate bar in the shape of a NES cartridge, made using a special custom mould, which was based on an actual NES cartridge. He used only the finest Austrian milk chocolate, and the final bid came to $46 for what amounted to seven ounces of the stuff. His latest creation is a chocolate bar based on the NES control pad (pictured).

NEC PC-FX EMULATOR RELEASED MAGIC MICHEL



David Michel, the author of pay-for PC-Engine emulator Magic Engine, has developed and released an emulator for NEC's rarer and less successful system, the PC-FX. Something of a 32-bit successor to the PC-Engine, it was released only in Japan at the end of 1994, but official support only continued until 1998. There were only 62 games released, and due to poor sales, plus a desperate need for support, NEC allowed developers to create whatever they wanted – meaning many of the titles were hentai-based. A demo of the emulator can be downloaded from www.magicengine.com.

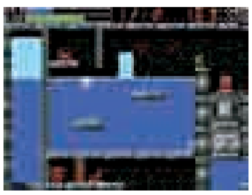
RETRO SCENE

A GAME LIKE SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT, BUT IN THE STYLE OF AN EIGHTIES MSX TITLE? COULD IT BE THE GREATEST HOME-BREW TITLE EVER?

LA MULANA

A GAME WE DARE COMPARE TO SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT – HIGH PRAISE INDEED

- **FORMAT:** WINDOWS PC
- **RELEASE DATE:** JUNE 2005 / JANUARY 2007
- **DEVELOPED BY:** GR3 PROJECT
- **TRANSLATED BY:** IAN KELLEY
- **LINK:** HTTP://AGTP.ROMHACK.NET/LAMULANA.HTML
- **PRICE:** FREE
- **REVIEWED BY:** JOHN SZCZEPANIAK



» At first water is fatal, but you eventually find an item which lets you breath underwater, and another which protects your MSX laptop.



» Eerie ruins, long forgotten statues from an ancient civilisation, and unique items hidden at the end of monster-infested corridors. Reminds you of *Super Metroid*, doesn't it?

L*a Mulana* is an enigma, wildly fluctuating and changing, much like the mysterious ruins which are its focal point. A dozen writers could scribe a hundred different reviews, and none would necessarily describe it accurately; this review has been rewritten 27 times, and we're still no closer to a draft which succinctly summarises things.

La Mulana is a Metroidvania game in the style of *Symphony Of The Night*, though the development team claim to have been going more for a *Maze Of Galious* atmosphere – it took five years to develop, and a further 18 months to translate (done by Ian Kelley in conjunction with the original developers, and hosted by Gideon Zhi of AGTP).

It features a massive retraceable map comprised of separate areas, which can be explored as specialised items are acquired – these allow double-jumps, breathing underwater, wall-climbing, warping, time-freezing, and myriad other exotic abilities. There's also a need to level-up and accumulate currency for use in many shops, plus a rather awesome storyline which, despite starting off like Indiana Jones, soon becomes rather creepy and otherworldly.

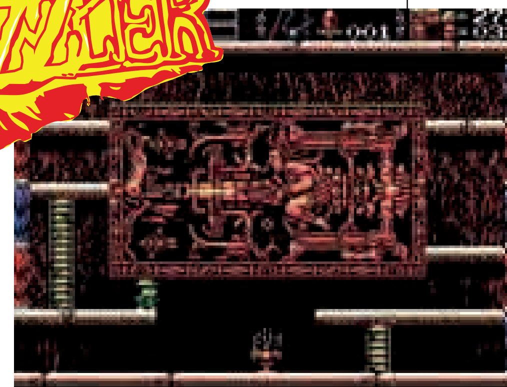
To claim it is better than *SotN* would be nonsensical, but *La Mulana* is certainly the more complex game and in certain ways, has more depth. When exploring the ruins you can read the diary entries of previous adventurers who died there, which give clues on how to proceed. There are also stone tablets that can be translated and read, sometimes offering crude maps. In this way a stronger storyline develops. Then there is the MSX cartridge-collecting. Scattered throughout the game are dozens and dozen of carts that can be plugged into the hero's portable MSX computer. Some simply provide map data, but others can be combined to create all manner of strange effects. Some increase invincibility when hit, or double the amount of EXP gained, while others increase vulnerability. Experimenting with combinations is tremendously fun.



» The bosses are both epic and awesome, often taking up the entire screen; they are quite tough to defeat.

Finally, overlaid onto everything, is a complex system of riddles, traps and puzzles, which are brought about through a highly interactive environment. Along with ground switches there are pedestals requiring a weight to be placed on them, which could result in any number of things, from traps being sprung to a door on the other side of the map opening up. Striking specific parts of walls can even have an effect – the trick is to assume you're a true archaeologist, and think about how to interact with the environment. There are invisible platforms, false walls, hidden switches and deceptive traps everywhere. Best of all is that some of these elements utilise archaic game logic (like *Tower Of Druaga*). One puzzle requires standing motionless beneath a certain spot while holding a specific item, while for another you need to pause the game in a room, again holding a specific item, and wait until the character's sleep animation kicks in, revealing things. This makes for an engrossing adventure, which, even with a guide, will take ages to complete. The first playthrough takes around 20-30 hours.

Before starting we were enamoured with it due to screenshots and reading the manual. The next three hours were then spent cursing the game for making it infuriatingly difficult to acquire the gold needed to buy essential items. Then there was the frustrating nature of early puzzles. But, like good mescaline, this game comes on slow. After the fourth hour, having bought the essential Hand Scanner (allowing text to be read) and Glyph Reader (allowing



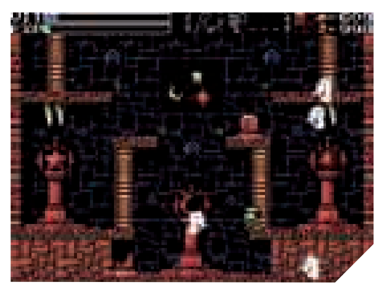
» The designs of the levels are beautiful and highly varied. Although it's been created in the MSX style, there's no repetition of scenery.

hieroglyphs to be translated), plus having found the warping Grail (allowing instant transport to previously visited locales), the game's true magic suddenly shines through.

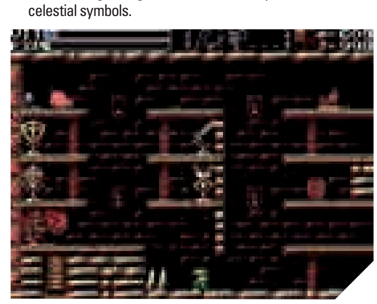
It's a game which benefits from the internet age, since the puzzle-based dynamic is suited to gamers who frequent forums; it encourages discussion, with forums filled with people discussing how to complete various puzzles offering out essential tit-bits.

It's the toughest game you'll ever play, but this only adds to the charm, and the rewards for persevering are worth it. Have faith in your abilities, and get some friends to play it at the same time.

RATING 95%



» There's plenty of cool puzzles to work through, like this involving hitting switches to match up three celestial symbols.



» These four items need to be destroyed in a specific order, which can only be found out by reading a specific corpse's diary.

THIS MONTH WE REVIEW TWO EXCEPTIONALLY GOOD REMAKES. THE ONE BASED ON STREETS OF RAGE, AND THE OTHER ON TEMPEST 2000.

Remake of the Month

STREETS OF RAGE

YOU WON'T BE ANGRY AT THE PRICE



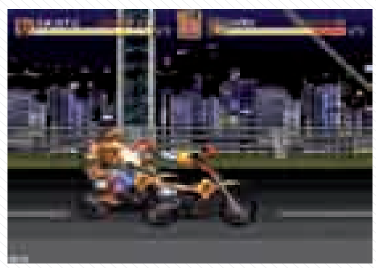
» **FORMAT:** PC WINDOWS
» **RELEASE DATE:** 31 DECEMBER 2006
» **DEVELOPED BY:** BOMBER GAMES
» **LINK:** WWW.BOMBERGAMES.NET
» **PRICE:** FREE
» **REVIEWED BY:** JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

Sometimes we question the point of videogame remakes. Then we start to question the point of even having this section dedicated to remakes, especially when the space could be better used covering new and original indie games. After all, why do people with amazing programming skills labour for hours to carbon replicate something that can be played via emulation anyway? Is it a lack of creative talent? At this point our cynicism makes us question why we even bother getting out of bed every morning, especially when vagrancy can seem so appealing. But then, like a biblical whale dashing the jagged gin bottle away from our tunica intima, there comes a title like *Streets Of Rage Remake* which, dissolves our cynicism and restores faith in the concept of remakes; this is precisely how remakes should be done.

Imagine everything good about the original *Streets Of Rage* trilogy, now imagine it sliced, diced, and remixed for your enjoyment, with the addition of some cool tweaks and extras. It features a total of eight characters, multiple paths like in *SoR3*, the return of Police Specials from *SoR1*, there are more scrolling layers in the stages, there are 34 remixed music tracks which are utterly sublime, nearly every single fight move from the trilogy plus a slew of new ones, and, to top it all off, a zany story with four possible endings.

Some will complain that the collision-detection is occasionally off, that it somehow feels "soulless" (even though the concept of a game having a soul is nonsensical), or that the system specifications are too high. These people are idiots. This isn't a cynical £30 PSP release, it's a fun game created out of love and respect for the source material. And it's completely free, so show some respect, download it, and enjoy.

RATING **92%**

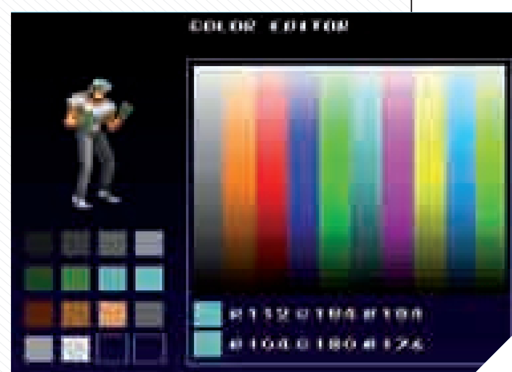


» You can now ride motorbikes and jet-skis, which is such an awesome thing, we totally forgot what we were going to put in this caption.

retro GAMER SIZZLER



» Bomber Games even went as far as including bonus mini-games which can be unlocked, such as volleyball, which this screen is displaying.

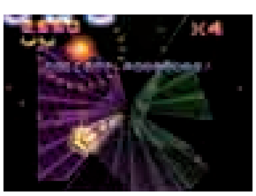


» The game is very customisable, with even a palette altering utility made available later on. Everything about this game screams attention to detail.

TYPHOON 2001

THE WIND BLOWS ONCE MORE

» **FORMAT:** WINDOWS PC
» **RELEASE DATE:** JANUARY 2007
» **DEVELOPED BY:** THORSTEN KUPHALDT
» **LINK:** HTTP://TYPHOON.KUTO.DE/
» **REVIEWED BY:** JOHN SZCZEPANIAK



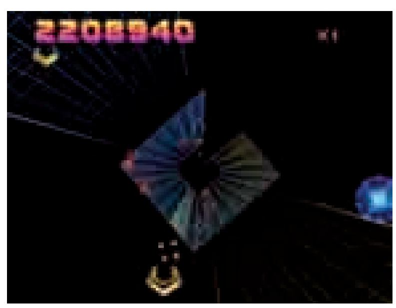
» Using the level editor Darran tried to recreate the Retro Gamer logo here. When we told him it looked nothing like it, he wept softly for hours.

Throw your Atari Jaguars away, there is no longer any need to own one, since *Typhoon 2001* is a remake of *Tempest*. The author describes it as having the best elements of the arcade original and the Jaguar iteration, remixed, with some new ideas thrown in. With these being such high quality games, it should be very difficult to create a bad remake – this though, is good, since *Typhoon 2001* turns out to be very good.

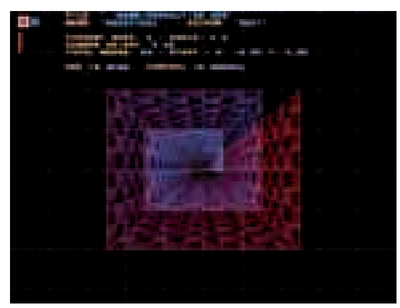
The problem with reviewing a remake of *Tempest* based on the Jaguar version, is that there are a variety of factors which can have odd results: the extreme, refined shmup gameplay and mesmerising visuals causes your brain to zone out from the surrounding reality; the pumping soundtrack (of a genre which we're too out of touch with modern youth to name) leads to a massive hike in adrenalin; the fantasmastic swivelling of the entire arena, thanks to a new camera mode, makes you twist your head like a loon (it's so good, we had to invent a new word for it – fantasmastic). All these things, when combined, mean that when you're killed by an enemy you inadvertently tense every muscle and fly back out the chair, flailing limbs like the drunken Irishman out of Black Books. Retro Gamer hasn't had this much of an intense head-trip since it mistook some Psilocybe Semilanceata for Agaricus Bisporus.

Another fantastic addition, and the highlight for us, is the inclusion of a level editor, which is highly versatile and allows all manner of complex *Tempest* webs to be created. Although a little complex to learn, it is highly versatile, so much so, it's amazing no one thought of doing it before.

Typhoon 2001 is not perfect, since some enemies from the Jag version are missing, and it also lacks Minter's original wacky bonus levels. But Thorsten Kuphaldt is aware of this, and states on his website that he is intending to continue working on it. Even so, right now it's amazing, and can only get better. We wish him luck, and in the meantime recommend that everyone downloads this immediately.



» With the new camera modes you can make the entire screen rotate around your craft. It's disorientating and nausea inducing, but in a wonderful way, like after a bottle of Buckfast.



» The level editor screen may not look exciting, but think about it, people. A level editor for *Tempest*. It allows YOU to create *Tempest* levels. We get giddy thinking about it.

RATING **89%**

BARGAIN HUNT

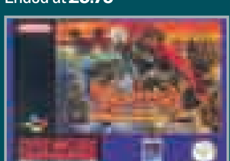
HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japan auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over 100 different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it!

RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. If something has sold for a staggeringly high amount of money (or lower than it normally would) you'll find them listed here.

EQUINOX
SNES
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£3.75**



THANATOS
SPECTRUM
Normally sells for **£1**
Ended at **£5.60**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**

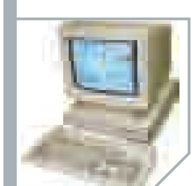


PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**

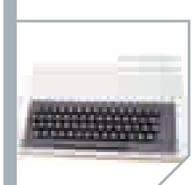


PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released!
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

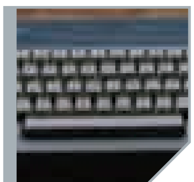
ACORN



ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (with games)**
Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor!



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**
Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- RENEGADE
- RICK DANGEROUS
- GRYZOR



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE

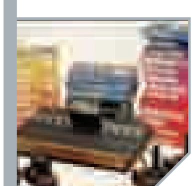


APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) (with games)**
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built machine and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



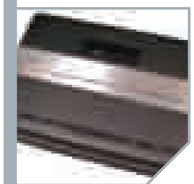
2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+**
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

★★★★★ ROCKING HORSE SHIT
★★★★ HEN'S TEETH
★★★ LUCKY FIND
★★ EBAY REGULAR
★ CAR BOOT SALE BARGAIN



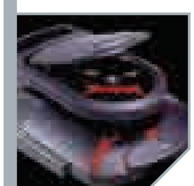
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

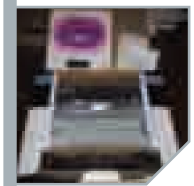


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

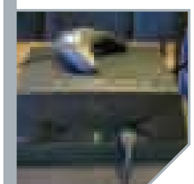
BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY ★★★★★
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) (prices fluctuate wildly)**
Ultra rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY ★★★★★
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



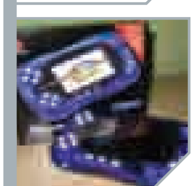
PIPPIN(ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY ★★★★★
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. It's high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



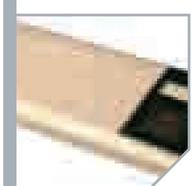
AMIGA500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) (more with games, depending on model)**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore, that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models, with differing specs, the Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY ★
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the best selling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND



C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.

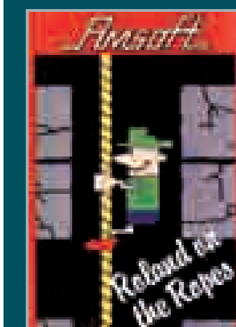


CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

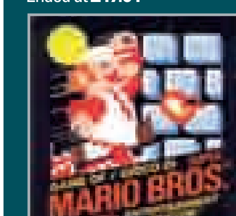
JET SET RADIO
DREAMCAST
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **50 pence**



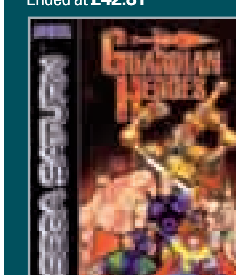
ROLAND ON THE ROPES
AMSTRAD
Normally sells for **£1**
Ended at **no sale**



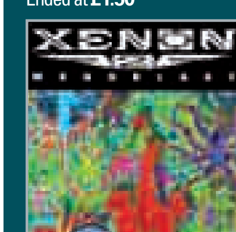
SUPER MARIO BROS
NES
Normally sells for **£8**
Ended at **£17.01**



GUARDIAN HEROES
SATURN
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£42.81**



XENON 2
AMIGA
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£1.50**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**
The computer that established Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**
Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**
A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive, (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



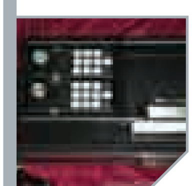
BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**
Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
– Kit Kat (Dark Chocolate)
– Milky Way
– Cadbury's Creme Egg



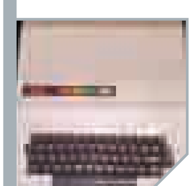
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
More inanity from the land of the rising sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio hoped it would do better than their failed PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (from the USA)**
The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**
Coleco's third generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
-CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) (very cheap on eBay)**
Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Failed console by Emerson, which had numerous different clones released as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



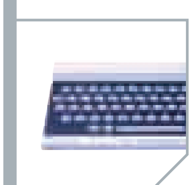
EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, which was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**
Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act! Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.
- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**
Another attempt by Sony to enter the videogame hardware market (after the MSX), this time they took over the market. There are countless undocumented yet excellent PS games. Was later re-released as the PSOne, which is more expensive, but looks much nicer in design.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPE
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) (allegedly for a mint system)**
Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupe was a unique 8-bit British home computer which didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



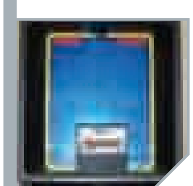
SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



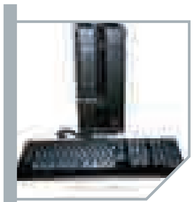
TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE

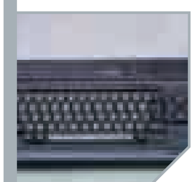


X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

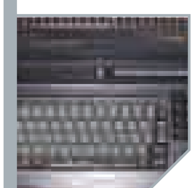
MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent homebrew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER



MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

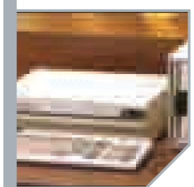
NEC



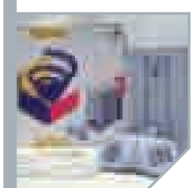
PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



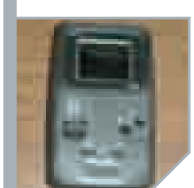
PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



PC-ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two system's Hu-Cards are not mutually compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) (massive fluctuations)**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- BLOODY WOLF
- NINJA SPIRIT



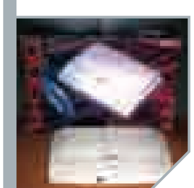
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) (prices can fluctuate)**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had 6 games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PCE CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PCE and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PCE DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PCE/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.



DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped down white version of the PCE Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a 6 button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over a 1000 games to choose from!



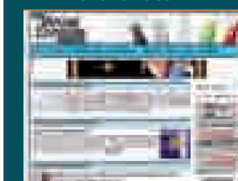
FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.



FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned,

RETRO GAMING SITES

THE VIRTUAL CONSOLE ARCHIVE
If you want news on the retro games that will be appearing on Nintendo's Virtual Console then you have no choice but to visit this site. Featuring news and non-biased reviews, the Virtual Console Archive is for those Wii owners that love retro gaming.
www.vc-reviews.com



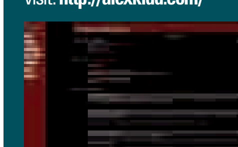
DIGITAL PRESS
Want to find out how many Mega Drive titles were released in the US? Digital Press is a "videogame database" populated with hundreds of knowledgeable gamers and should be your first port of call if you're looking at getting into the collecting scene.
www.digitpress.com



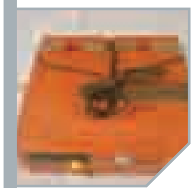
DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO ZZAP 64
Zzap 64 remains one of the best loved C64 magazines, so it's hardly surprising to find a website dedicated to the mag. Featuring hundreds of scans, reviews and Oliver Frey art, Def Guide to Zzap 64 is worth a visit.
www.zzap64.co.uk



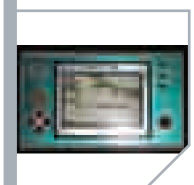
ALEX KIDD.COM
It's a little known fact that *Alex Kidd* is our sub editor's favourite ever game. Maybe it's because the series is fairly easy to play (he's not that good at games bless him) or it could be down to the fact that they look very similar to each other. He should visit: **http://alexkidd.com/**



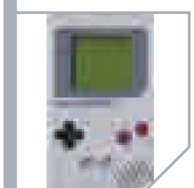
the drive belts break very easily.



SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



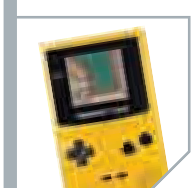
GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yoko.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite it's age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact GB, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic GB. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of their cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72 pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of their most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JPN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



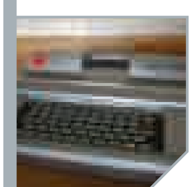
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips.The 200 series consists of front loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) (more with DVC)**
Consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000, that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



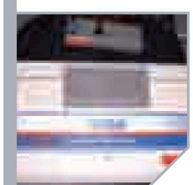
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance it's capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- CRAZY TAXI
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. Could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history! The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc.**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) (according to eBay)**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.

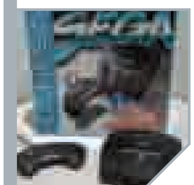


TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer

hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» » PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.

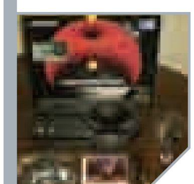


GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**
CDX/Xeye
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) (more with games)**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook style boxes.

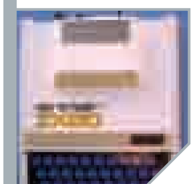
- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR. AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse, that despite an amazing catalogue of games never really took off.

- SATURN BOMBERMAN
- GUARDIAN HEROES
- DRAGON FORCE

SINCLAIR

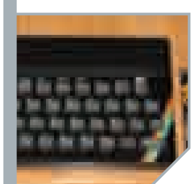


ZX-80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) Apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX-81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX-80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
-SABOTAGE



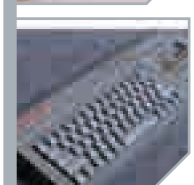
ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, it was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK



NEOGEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
High powered home system by SNK. Features many high quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEOGEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) (multi-slot systems cost more)**
High powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of NeoGeo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted).

- METAL SLUG
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- WAKU WAKU 7

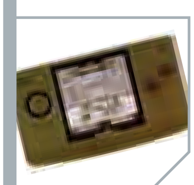


NEOGEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**



NEOGEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**
CD-based NeoGeo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of NeoGeo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has slightly improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHOWDOWN RPG



NEOGEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



NEOGEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Handheld NeoGeo systems by SNK, that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

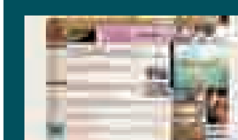
- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

RETRO GAMING SITES

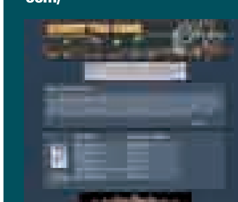
OLD-COMPUTERS.COM
If you're a gamer who believes consoles ruined the videogames industry then pay a visit to Old-Computers. Com. Some ten years in the making and filled with info and screenshots of nearly 1,000 different machines, Old-Computers.com is a remarkable achievement and well worth a visit. **http://old-computers.com/news/default.asp**



RPG GAMER
RPG Gamer is quite possibly the most comprehensive videogame website that we've ever had the pleasure of stumbling across. While it features in-depth reviews and walkthroughs for all the latest consoles there are still plenty of guides for those who follow the path of retro. Everything from *The Bard's Tale* to *Panzer Dragoon Saga* is covered here, meaning that your favourite RPG is bound to get a mention. **www.rpgamer.com**



SHOOT-THE-CORE
We're huge fans of the shoot-'em-up genre at Retro Gamer, so a website that not only features hundreds of great home-brew shooters, but actually enables you to download many of them for free is always going to be high on our priorities. While not a retro site as such, the influence to past classics is obvious. If you've ever loved any shooter then Shoot-The-Core is bound to rekindle that passion. **http://shootthecore.moonpod.com/**



Special thanks to **lofi-gaming-org.uk** who supplied several of our screenshots

THE MAKING OF…

BANJO KAZOOIE

IN AN EXCLUSIVE NEW INTERVIEW RARE REVEALS ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING ABOUT THE CREATION OF ITS DYNAMIC DUO



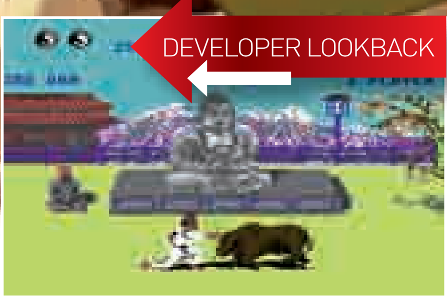
retro GAMER

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ON SALE 29 MARCH 2007

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



MELBOURNE HOUSE

Join Retro Gamer in the first of a two part series as it looks back at the lengthy history of one of Australia's best-known developers.

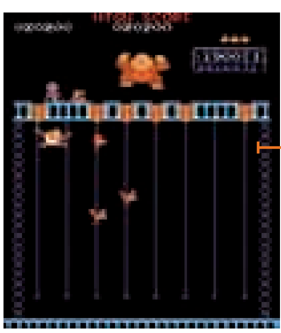
OTHER EXCITING FEATURES…

- Konami's Iga discusses the creation of *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*
- We take an in-depth look at Bandai's Japanese handheld, the WonderSwan
- Discover the games and the secrets behind The Sega Technical Institute
- David Crane stops by to discuss his seminal Atari 2600 hit *Pitfall!*

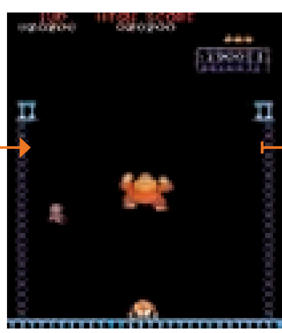


DONKEY KONG JR

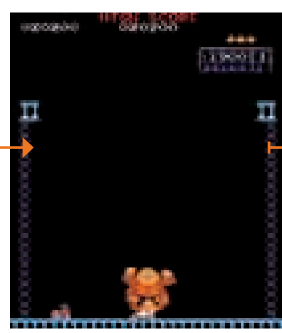
Miffed with Donkey Kong's treatment of Pauline in Miyamoto's original arcade hit, Jump Man (now Mario by deed poll) decides to kidnap the giant ape and give him a taste of his own medicine. But who will rescue the mighty primate?



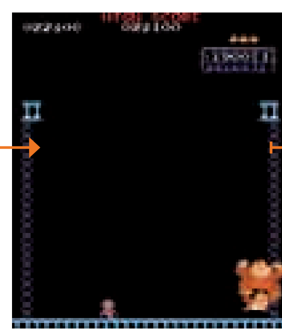
SCREEN 1
After dodging birds, snapjaws, gaping chasms and everything else that Mario throws at him the end is nearly in sight for Donkey Kong Jr. The little tyke has to push six keys towards to the top of the screen in order to free his dad and he's nearly done it. Just one more to go…



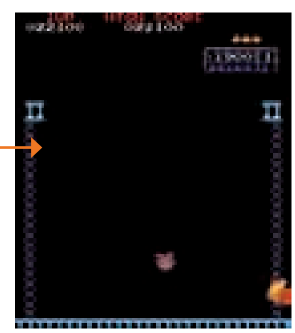
SCREEN 2
Success. The final key turns and the girder that was supporting Donkey Kong and Mario falls away causing the duo to plummet downwards. As the big monkey and his master fall to the floor below Donkey Kong Jr it looks like the big ape is going to crush his son. Look out Jr, you're going to get squashed.



SCREEN 3
He might be small but Jr possesses amazing strength and just at the last moment, he catches his beloved pop and displays a smile so big that it almost makes his face disappear. Mario meanwhile hits the concrete with all the dignity that only an Italian, overweight plumber can muster.



SCREEN 4
Finally reunited, the two apes quickly exit to the right of the screen, no doubt eager to plan their next videogame appearance (interestingly, they always get paid in bananas). Mario meanwhile is incensed with his inhuman treatment at the hands of the furry critters and sets off in fast pursuit.



SCREEN 5
Unfortunately for the plucky plumber Donkey Kong senior is ready and waiting for him and gives Mario a hefty kick up the backside. Enraged with the savage treatment Mario picks himself up, stars in *Super Mario Bros.* and uses his money to exterminate all the apes of the world.